

The Story of PCUN and the Farmworker Movement in Oregon

LYNN STEPHEN

in collaboration with PCUN staff members



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Department of Anthropology
University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon 97405

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Cover photograph: Negotiators Demetria Avila, Job Pozos Jr., and PCUN President Ramón Ramírez signing Nature's Fountain Farms contract on March 31, 1998.

Title page photograph: PCUN strike near Brooks, 1995.

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Pineros y Campesinos Unidos
del Noroeste (PCUN)
300 Young Street
Woodburn OR 97071
(503) 982-0243

<http://www.pcun.org>
farmworkerunion@pcun.org

Department of Anthropology
University of Oregon
Eugene OR 97403-1218
(541) 346-5102

[http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/
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Acknowledgements

HISTORIES PROVIDE RECOGNITION and legitimation of past events, experiences, and interpretations for those living in the present. The history that follows was born out of a need to document an important part of Mexican, Chicano, Latino and labor history in the state of Oregon. Chicano students at the University of Oregon spoke with me about the lack of educational materials that reflected some of the experiences of their families as migrants to the state. Others wanted recognition for those who have labored and continue to labor as farmworkers. Staff and members from *Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste* (Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United, or PCUN) expressed a need to document their own history. As activists who are continually caught up in the dynamics of their work, they had little time to devote to such a project. Hence the idea for collaboration between an anthropologist, student researchers from the University of Oregon, PCUN, and the Wayne Morse Chair for Law and Politics. It is my hope that this history of the farmworker movement in Oregon in general and the story of PCUN in particular will provide a starting point for other collaborative efforts to uncover the rich history of farmworkers in our state, and will serve as a resource to a wide range of people interested in the topic.

Collaborations involve participatory processes that take more time than solo creations. Here, PCUN staff and University of Oregon students worked together to organize the PCUN archives, to copy relevant material for the history, and to identify key actors—both past and present—who could help us to build a picture of farmworker organizing in Oregon and the role of PCUN in that process. We identified a group of fourteen people who were interviewed, often for two to three hours at a time. The tapes were transcribed (often in Spanish), transcripts returned to those who were interviewed, and these texts became part of the data base for building the history. In addition, audiotapes, videotapes, and photographs from PCUN archives were reviewed. I wrote a preliminary draft that was then reviewed by PCUN and was redrafted several times based on input from PCUN staff and members. Thus the final product here is the result of the work of many.

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The Oregon Council for the Humanities has generously granted permission for reprinting the map showing the border that separated the Oregon territory from the country of Mexico in 1845. The map is reprinted from page twelve of *Nosotros: The Hispanic People of Oregon*, edited by Erasmo Gamboa and Carolyn M. Braun, Portland: The Oregon Council for the Humanities.

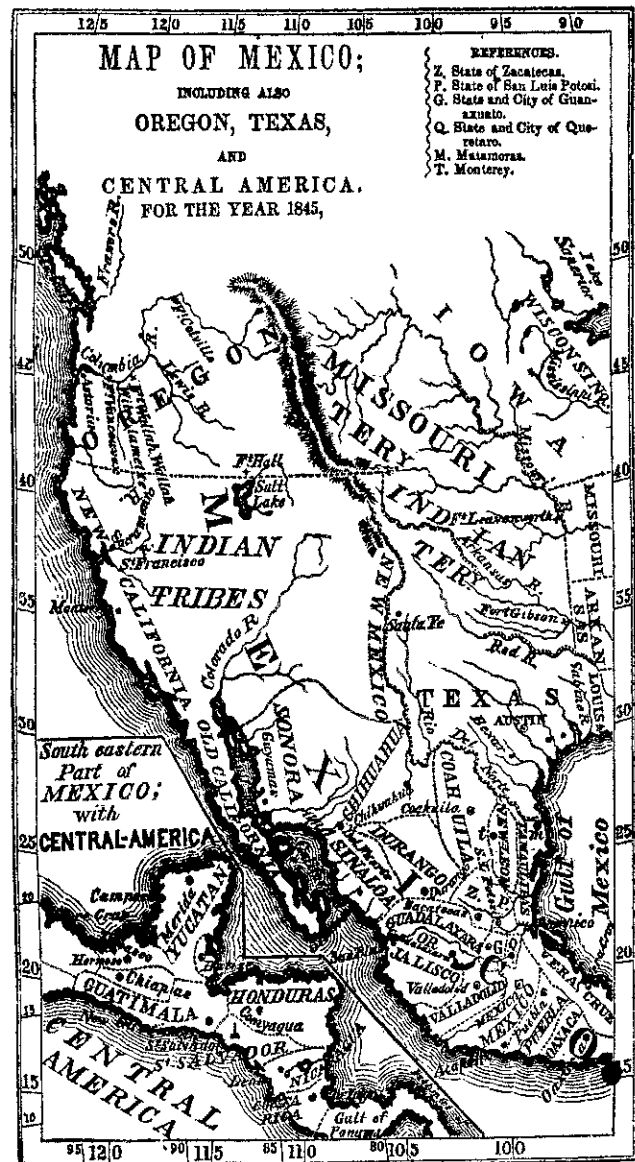
Introduction

WHILE MOST OF US TEND TO THINK of Mexico as another country, somewhere south of the border, or a vacation destination, Mexico has, in fact, always been intimately connected to the United States—culturally, politically, and economically. Until 1848, what are now the states of California, Arizona, and New Mexico—as well as parts of Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado, and Nevada—belonged to Mexico. In Oregon, the Mexican border extended to just south of Ashland until 1846, when a treaty signed between England and the United States confirmed U.S. title to what was known as the Territory of Oregon (which also included what are now the states of Washington and Idaho as well). Independent Mexico lost more than half of its territory to the U.S. after the U.S. initiated the Mexican-American War.

Today, Mexican workers living in the United States with a variety of legal statuses are a key part of our labor force. In Oregon, the leading industry is agriculture. The Willamette Valley alone produces 170 different crops, and Marion county—located in this valley—is Oregon's leading agricultural producing county. Mexican farmworkers form the backbone of this agricultural production: Oregon has more than 100,000 farmworkers, ninety-eight percent of which are Latino, primarily of Mexican origin.¹ Many of these farmworkers live permanently in the state.² Others work

¹Latino refers to persons who live in the United States and trace their ancestry to Latin America or, in some cases, the Caribbean or Spain. The 2001 U.S. Census identified 35.8 million people as "Spanish/Hispanic/Latino." The term "Latino" was included for the first time in the 2000 census. In that census, people of Spanish/Hispanic/Latino origin could identify as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban or "other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino." The Mexican-American population, sometimes also referred to as "Chicano" (a more politicized term for people of Mexican origin linked to activist movements of Mexican-Americans in the 1960s and 1970s), reached 20.6 million or 7.3 percent of the total U.S. population of 281.4 million (Information from Guzmán 2001:1-2).

²The number of farmworkers varies by source cited. PCUN organizers state that there are approximately 100,000 farmworkers. The 1997 Census of Agriculture puts the number at 124,400 and the Oregon Employment Department puts the numbers between 40,100 and 86,400 in 1999, depending on the month. Many farmworkers who stay in the state for long periods of time not only work in the fields from June to September, but also work in canneries, frozen food plants, restaurants, childcare, and construction at other times of the year when they are not in the fields. (See League of Women Voters of Oregon 2000)



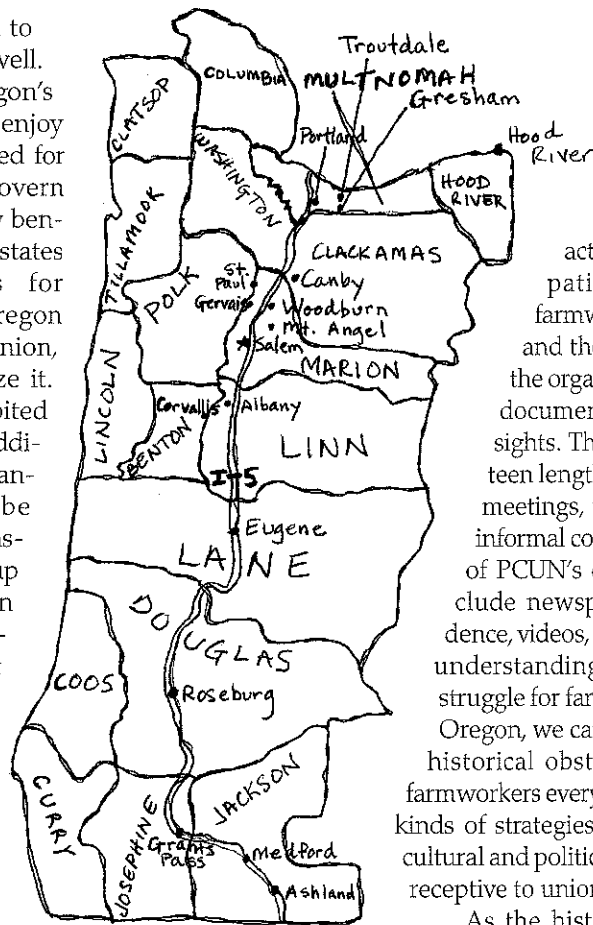
Map of the Original Territory of Mexico

temporarily in the state and move on to other areas of the U.S. and Canada as well.

While farmworkers are key to Oregon's agricultural production, they do not enjoy many of the basic protections provided for other workers. Federal laws that govern wages and hours, overtime, and many benefits do not apply to farmworkers, and states can create their own statutes for farmworkers. For example, while Oregon farmworkers can now join a labor union, growers are not required to recognize it. Until 1990, farmworkers were prohibited from picketing during a harvest.³ In addition, farmworker housing is often substandard and farmworkers may be overcharged for housing, food, and transportation by labor contractors, ending up with very little in their paychecks. In sum, farmworkers are treated as a second-class group of workers who do not deserve the same rights and protections that others do.

How did this situation come to be and what can be done about it? One clear solution is for farmworkers to seek collective bargaining agreements with growers. Collective bargaining refers to the rights of workers to be represented collectively by a union representative who negotiates with employers to reach agreement on the terms of employment. Such agreements focus on fair treatment on the job, obtaining a living wage, the creation of a seniority system, provision of basic benefits, and the rights of workers to have decision-making power regarding workplace issues.

This document tells the history of the farmworker movement in Oregon by focusing on the *only* farmworker union in the state of Oregon: Pineros y Campesinos Unidos



Map of western Oregon

del Noroeste (Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United), commonly referred to and abbreviated as PCUN. The story is told from the perspective of those who were active in founding and participating in PCUN—including farmworkers, field organizers, staff, and those who worked closely with the organization. This history serves to document their experiences and insights. The research is based on fourteen lengthy interviews, observations of meetings, visits to the fields and many informal conversations, as well as a study of PCUN's extensive archives which include newspaper clippings, correspondence, videos, and photographs. Through an understanding of the history of PCUN's struggle for farmworker rights in the state of Oregon, we can learn a great deal about the historical obstacles that have existed for farmworkers everywhere, as well as seeing what kinds of strategies are necessary for creating a cultural and political climate which will be more receptive to union organizing.

As the history of PCUN suggests, the struggle for farmworker rights encompasses a wide range of issues including immigration, racism, health, housing, gender inequality, and more. Oregon represents one of the toughest political climates for organizing a farmworker union, but the track record of PCUN shows, "*Si, se puede*" ("Yes, it can be done"). While the struggle for farmworker rights is long from over, considerable gains have been won over the past twenty-five years and it is no longer a question of *if* farmworkers will be able to collectively bargain on a significant scale, but *when and how*. With four contracts signed, PCUN is leading the way in that struggle.

³A PCUN lawsuit overturned this in 1990.

Part I

Mexican Labor Becomes Dominant in Oregon Agriculture (1942–76)

IN THE 1940s, THE FACE OF OREGON'S agricultural labor force was permanently transformed as Mexican workers became the majority. By the early 1970s, individuals from Mexico or of Mexican descent comprised over 95 percent of farmworkers. Starting in the late 1950s, sizeable Mexican communities began to emerge in Willamette Valley towns like Woodburn and Gervais. These trends raised the need for social services, increased frictions with local authorities, and sparked organizing and activism—much of it fueled by the examples of the United Farm Worker union's escalating struggles in California and the national civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s.

Early Mexican Farmworkers, the Bracero Program, and the Beginning of INS Raids in Oregon

Growth of the Mexican population in Oregon was spurred in the 1940s by three related factors: continuing growth in agriculture, the onset of World War II, and the existence of the Bracero Program (designed to recruit Mexican laborers to replace those who had either entered the U.S. armed forces or who had left farm labor to work in industry). The demand for food production plus expansion of irrigation and electrification boosted commercial acreage, while the war pulled much of the existing labor force into war production. In order to bridge the gap between the increasing demand for agricultural workers and their decreasing numbers among the U.S. population, Public Law 45 was created to appropriate the necessary funds to implement an executive agreement with Mexico to import thousands—and eventually millions—of guest workers, or *braceros*. Although the Bracero Program was created to alleviate wartime labor shortages, it lasted until 1965. Many more workers were contracted in the period after the end of World War II (4,000,000) than during the war itself (168,000).

The Bracero Program allowed the importation of Mexican workers for annual harvests with the stipulation that they were to return to Mexico after their work was finished. Braceros were contract workers who were supposed to have certain guarantees met in terms of housing, transportation,

wages, recruitment, health care, food, and the number of hours they worked. The contracts—initially negotiated directly between the U.S. and Mexican governments—even stipulated that there should be no discrimination against the braceros. However, compliance officers, including Mexican consular officials, were few and far between. Contracts were switched from governmental management to private U.S. contractors later in the program. Most growers and the U.S. government ignored the terms of the contracts but the braceros had no recourse. The Bracero Program blocked farmworker unionization and has been called legalized slavery by some, including the last director of the program, Lee Williams. Although the Bracero Program ended on the national level in 1947, it was renegotiated and started again in many states in 1949. It finally ended in 1964. The Bracero Program existed in the state of Oregon from 1942–47 (see Gamboa 1990). Unlike other states, it was not continued after 1947. Approximately 15,136 braceros were contracted as farm laborers in the state of Oregon from Mexico during this time (Gamboa 1995a:41). Additional bracero workers were also employed on Oregon railroads from 1943–46.

Bracero workers were welcome as long as they were obedient and did not question the terms of their labor contracts. The treatment of Mexican bracero laborers between 1942 and 1947 provides us with a clue to future expectations for Mexican farmworkers in Oregon: they should be docile and content with what they were offered; if they tried to protest, they would be dismissed. At the end of the Bracero Program in Oregon in 1947, the labor camps were closed, and all contracted laborers were supposed to return to Mexico. Those that did not could be deported as “illegal aliens”⁴—a practice that increased at the end of World War II and continues to this day.

By the 1950s, a Mexican-American migratory and resident seasonal labor force was becoming more commonplace, particularly in the Willamette and Treasure valleys in Oregon. In general, the conditions for farmworkers were

⁴While “illegal alien” is the technical, legal term used by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), many people consider this term inappropriate and offensive. More neutral terms such as “undocumented worker” are preferable.

abysmal, and in 1950 the average income of farmworkers was reported as being between one and two thousand dollars per year. The 1950s were also marked by a U.S. immigration policy characterized by large-scale deportation. From 1954 to 1959, the "Operation Wetback"⁵ program focused on preventing undocumented people from entering the U.S. and on rounding up and deporting undocumented people already here. Between 1954 and 1959, Operation Wetback was responsible for deporting over 3.7 million Latinos, including some who were U.S. citizens (Carrasco 1997:197). Many Mexicans were deported from Oregon during this period as well. The culture of immigration raids and the right of INS agents to detain "foreign-looking" workers in any location also became entrenched.

Operation Wetback set up an ongoing contradiction which exists to this day: while official U.S. immigration policy states that its purpose is to discourage and remove "illegal workers," growers and ranchers continue to depend upon and desire their labor. This fundamental contradiction has left farmworkers in a very vulnerable position—particularly those who are undocumented. In combination with the discriminatory practices of U.S. labor law, farmworkers have continued to exist as a captive labor force—desired on the one hand by growers for their hard work and low wages, but vulnerable because of few or no labor protections and threats of detention and deportation by the INS, often for simply "looking illegal."

Initial Organizational Efforts To Serve Farmworkers in Oregon: Churches in the 1950s

During the 1950s, the farm labor force in Oregon continued to be composed of four groups: local laborers (especially students), migrant workers from California and Texas (almost all Chicanos), undocumented Mexican workers, and a small number of *bracero* workers (Kleinman n.d.). In most cases, members of these groups lived in badly deteriorated housing and endured dismal working conditions.

Religious organizations were some of the first to attempt to reach out to the farmworker population in the state of Oregon. The Portland Catholic Archdiocese established a Migrant Ministry in 1955 to serve the Mexican migrant population. The Ministry provided mass, sacraments, and other services to the Catholic Mexican community. In 1955, the Oregon Council of Churches took on the problems of the growing number of migrant workers and formed its own Migrant Ministry Committee.

⁵While "Operation Wetback" was the official name of an INS border defense and deportation program, the name incorporates the racially and ethnically offensive term *wetback* to refer to undocumented Mexicans who crossed the Rio Grande river to enter the U.S. This racial slur was generalized to refer to all undocumented Mexicans and was standard vocabulary in past government documents and in the press.

In 1956, the Oregon Council of Churches requested that the Oregon legislature investigate the "serious problems of the 40,000 migrants who come to Oregon each year" (*The Oregonian* 1956:3). At the time, Oregon was reported to be seventh in the United States in the numbers of migrants needed each year to plant and harvest crops and work in canneries. In January of 1958, the Oregon state labor commissioner established a migrant farm labor division, indicating a formal recognition by the state of the significance of the farmworker population. That same year, a legislative interim committee on migratory labor carried out an extensive study that examined recruitment, transportation, wages and earnings, housing, health, sanitation, education, and public welfare (Legislative Interim Committee on Migratory Labor 1958). Carried out by a team of 300 volunteer investigators working with the Bureau of Labor, the report revealed what *The Oregonian* called "shocking conditions" in some of the state's migrant labor camps (Bianco 1958:9). The observations and testimony of those who worked on the report emphasized corruption and deceit on the part of labor contractors. The assistant commissioner of labor testified before the Interim Committee on Migratory Labor that contractors moved migrants from Texas to Oregon up to seven weeks before harvesting season began. Farmworkers arrived to find no work and were consequently forced to run up bills at grocery stores that were later deducted from any wages they made (Bianco 1958). Through the work of these various committees, churches were some of the first organizations to document working conditions and raise awareness of farmworker issues.

Early Political and Labor Organizing for Farmworkers: 1960-77

The conditions discussed in the 1958 report of the Interim Labor Committee finally put the living and working conditions for farmworkers on the political and cultural map in Oregon. In the mid-1960s, three other larger events came to strongly influence the Oregon farmworker community. The first was the creation of a range of health, education, and job training programs (developed by Congress at the request of President Lyndon Johnson) which came to be known as "The War on Poverty." One of these programs was VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), a domestic version of the Peace Corps. The other significant events were the establishment of the National Farmworkers Association under the direction of César Chávez and Dolores Huerta in California, and a table grape strike in Delano, California.

In 1964, the Catholic church-based Migrant Ministry changed its name to Oregon Friends of Migrants and formed a coalition of clergy, legislators, farm-labor employers and Mexican-American residents, which became known as the Valley Migrant League (Gamboa 1995b:48). The organization applied for a federal grant to provide adult education, vocational training, day care, health services, and summer

school for migrant workers and their families, and eventually received a \$680,000 grant from the Office of Economic Opportunity, as well as eighty VISTA volunteers to carry out the programs. A critical problem of the coalition, however, is that it had no programs run by the farmworkers themselves; instead, it was dominated by service providers and farm-labor employers. In 1965, the board of directors was composed of growers, legislators, clergy, some migrants, and local citizens. Ironically, the assistant director was a labor contractor.

In 1970, Mexican farmworkers took control of the Valley Migrant League by amending the by-laws to raise board membership requirements from 51 to 100 percent migrant representation. After that date, labor contractors, crew leaders, and growers had no say in the administration (Gamboa 1995b:49). However, because the Valley Migrant League was federally funded, it was not allowed to assume a direct political role. Consequently, it remained ineffective as an advocate for unionization or the improvement of housing and working conditions. This work was left for others. However, the Valley Migrant League (later known as Oregon Rural Opportunities—ORO), did play an important role in establishing farmworkers clinics, such as *Salud de la Familia* (Family Health) in Woodburn. Although ORO collapsed in 1979 when the federal government revoked its funding after audits uncovered many irregularities, the *Salud* clinic continued and the Oregon Human Development Corporation emerged to claim the job training and other government-funded programs previously run by ORO (Kleinman n.d.).

In the mid-1970s, Mexicans began to work in greater numbers as treeplanters and thinners in the reforestation industry—work that was previously done primarily by Anglo workers. They worked through contractors and in the off-season looked for jobs in farmwork, nurseries, and canneries—often through the same contractor. The number of Mexican laborers in agriculture also continued to grow as the industry did. This growth in the population of laborers created the necessary conditions for the birth of the United Farm Workers (UFW) in California, and while the UFW was gaining momentum in that state organizing Filipino and Mexican workers, the United Farm Workers of Oregon emerged in 1968.

Unlike the UFW in California, however, the United Farm Workers of Oregon was not a formal union, although members did work to protest substandard conditions in farmworker housing, grower policies denying access to labor camps, and inadequate field sanitation. The membership cards stated, "The goal of the United Farm Workers of Oregon is to strive for better hours, wages, working conditions, and a better life for farm workers in Oregon." United Farm Workers of Oregon worked with other organizations to pressure the state government to investigate migrant housing conditions, even once taking a governor's aid on a housing tour. Their activities continued into the 1970s. By 1976 there was an office in Portland and support committees in various places throughout the state.

In 1970, the Chicano United Farm Workers of Oregon also emerged to struggle for farmworker rights. The initiatives of both this group and the United Farm Workers of Oregon did not fully develop, but helped to pressure other groups such as the Valley Migrant League to support the boycott of California table grapes and lettuce promoted by the United Farm Workers. These farmworker organizations were political and also began to promote a model of worker-controlled organizations, as well as advocating for the goal of farmworkers' collective bargaining rights.

The influence of the UFW's work in California focusing on the right to collective bargaining also had repercussions in Oregon. Existing organizations supporting farmworkers became divided over whether or not to support the Delano table grape strike and to become more active in their approach to aiding farmworkers. In March 1966, a motion to support the Delano strikers divided the Migrant Ministry Committee of the Oregon Council of Churches. The committee finally approved a statement of support for "those farmworkers who are seeking for themselves the right to bargain collectively with large corporation farms, a right given to other American workers" (Kleinman n.d.). In June 1966, a split also emerged in the Valley Migrant League. The Washington county area director was forced to resign after she articulated beliefs that a more direct approach was necessary to improve conditions in farm labor, as opposed to what she saw as the more passive social welfare approach taken by the Valley Migrant League.

In 1971, the issue of collective bargaining rights for farmworkers exploded onto the public policy scene when the Oregon legislature debated and passed Senate Bill 677. Heavily promoted by the agribusiness lobby, the bill established collective bargaining procedures which strongly favored growers, such as limiting strikes and boycotts and forcing union organizers to register with the state. UFW successes in California—especially the groundbreaking contracts signed with grape growers in 1970—prompted growers in Idaho, Arizona, Kansas, and Oregon, to propose and win passage of such legislation in an attempt to prevent or at least frustrate the spread of effective union organizing. In Oregon, however, the UFW mounted campaigns to defeat or overturn the bill. UFW President César Chávez, his brother Richard Chávez, and UFW co-founder Dolores Huerta all led rallies at the state capitol in Salem, denouncing SB 677 and threatening a national boycott of Oregon products if the bill became law. In July 1971, Oregon Governor Tom McCall, a Republican, vetoed SB 677 as unconstitutional, although he bristled at the boycott threat and stated in his veto message that it "very nearly persuaded me to sign the bill." In the 1973 session, the Oregon legislature passed a state collective bargaining bill with the main goal of covering public employees. Farmworkers were excluded from this bill.

Part II

Immigrant Rights Organizing: Setting the Foundation for PCUN (1977–84)

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SOLID community base was an essential element in the creation, durability, and effectiveness of PCUN. The work towards forging that base was not focused solely on labor issues and conditions, but rather in an area of equal or sometimes greater and more immediate concern to the community: immigration. The Willamette Valley Immigration Project became the base-building vehicle of PCUN—and eventually the service arm of the organization—through its work leading resistance to INS raids, fighting individual deportation cases, and assisting immigrants with the legal immigration process.

Colegio César Chávez and the Creation of the Willamette Valley Immigration Project (WVIP)

In 1973, a novel experiment in higher education began in Mt. Angel, Oregon, which brought together three leaders who became key in the struggle to establish PCUN. Colegio César Chávez was begun by a group of Chicano activists and educators who took over the failing Mt. Angel College and proceeded to develop the only independent, accredited, and degree-granting institution for Chicanos in the country. They used an approach called the “College without Walls,” which encouraged students to remain active in their communities and to realize both that they learn valuable lessons from their community experiences that can be brought to the classroom, as well as the fact that theory learned in the classroom can work towards solving community problems.

Colegio César Chávez operated a G.E.D. (high school equivalency) program, an adult basic education program, a childcare center, and a migrant summer school. The language requirements for graduation were unique, including knowledge of the English language, knowledge of the Spanish language, and “a working knowledge of Pocho Spanish⁶

⁶“Pocho Spanish” refers to a hybrid language drawing on Spanish and English developed among the Chicano population, referred to by some as “Spanglish.” It is derived from the term “Chuco” which refers to a barrio or neighborhood language from Los Angeles that was a mixture of Spanish, English, old Spanish and words adapted by the border Mexicans. The language may have originated around El Paso, Texas among Chicanos, who brought it to Los Angeles in the 1930s (Acuña 1998:310).

in oral and written form,” according to a recruitment brochure. The school averaged about fifty students per academic quarter. Its alumnae include Ramón Ramírez, Cipriano Ferrel, and Juan Mendoza, all founders of PCUN.⁷ In 1983, after a long struggle to pay an inherited debt to the Department of Urban Housing and Development and what alumnae Ramírez describes as “right-wing opposition,” the Colegio was shut down. Its former students, however, continued the spirit of the institution in their work.

The college was a community-based school with loose ties to Chicano and migrant organizations. Out of these ties grew the first meeting between farmworkers and students at the Colegio. A second meeting was torpedoed by locals who discouraged farmworkers from attending the meetings—indicative of the hostile climate to farmworker organizing which existed in the area at the time. This experience informed the strategy that PCUN founders later used to build confidence in the community. Former student and current (2001) PCUN president Ramón Ramírez recalls:

We organized our first meeting of farmworkers at the Colegio César Chávez...because we were students [at the Colegio] and a lot of those students were farmworkers. We pulled together a meeting with about thirty farmworkers. And, it was really good and people started talking about...the conditions, about the need to organize.... We left that meeting, you know, thinking...that we were getting the confidence of some of the workers. But then at the next meeting nobody showed up. What we found out was that some people had actually discouraged the workers from coming back to meet with us. Because they said that these meetings were going to lead to a union and that we were going to have strikes and that people were going to get fired.

Clearly, moving directly into the unionization of farmworkers was a difficult proposition. After that meeting, organizers took a step back and decided to focus on an even more pressing problem: immigrant rights. During the late 1960s and the early 1970s, there was a marked increase in INS activity targeting farmworkers. In September 1969, INS agents arrested eighty-six farmworkers in separate raids in the Hood River and Medford areas. That year between June

⁷Ferrel died suddenly in 1995.

and October alone, arrests totaled 242 people. By 1973, INS deportations from Oregon were averaging about 1,000 per year (Kleinman n.d.). A significant number of the arrests were of reforestation workers. In October 1976, there were immigration raids at the Castle and Cook mushroom plant in Salem, Oregon and in the city of Woodburn, Oregon, which resulted in the deportation of eighty Mexican workers. At this time, Cipriano Ferrel, Ramón Ramírez, Larry Kleinman, Juan Mendoza, and others began talking together about organizing an immigration project.

While focusing on the long-term goal of collective bargaining rights for farmworkers, these four later PCUN founders realized that their first step towards this goal was to build credibility in the local community. Ferrel came out of an organizing experience with the UFW in California, Kleinman had worked for two years in legal offices serving low-income clients in Washington, Ramírez was a Chicano movement activist in Los Angeles as well as at the University of Washington in Seattle, and Mendoza came to the Colegio César Chávez from San Jose, California. Together they decided that it made the most sense to found an immigration project which focused on the harassment that the Mexican population faced from the Immigration and Naturalization Service, often with the collaboration and support of the local police. The vision of a farmworker union also remained strong, particularly for Cipriano Ferrel. Larry Kleinman recalls their initial strategizing:

...it was clear from the lessons learned in the UFW and in the Latino community in general, the immigrant community, that anything you are going to do, any kind of labor organizing or other kind of organizing that you were going to do in an immigrant community has to build a broad base and be relevant to the whole, to the community at large.... If we...just concentrated on certain farms with certain workers, those efforts however valiant and courageous would ultimately be eroded and would not survive. We had to build broad, a broad base and therefore had to do things that weren't union organized per se.... We were building a broad base around issues of greatest concern in the community. And immigration and immigration raids were the issues.

In May 1977, the Willamette Valley Immigration Project (WVIP) opened its doors in Portland, Oregon to provide confidential legal advice and representation for undocumented workers with immigration problems. By the end of 1977, the WVIP had seven bilingual staff members and a summer office at the Colegio. The WVIP served as the foundation for the later creation of PCUN in 1985.

During the Willamette Valley Immigration Project's first two years, it was supported in part through funds from the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA), a program established by the Carter administration to deal with issues of unemployment and recession. In Oregon, CETA supported many community organizations. The WVIP also received support from the National Lawyers Guild, including sponsorship for summer internships in 1977, 1978, and

1979. After 1979, the CETA funding dried up and the four founders (Cipriano Ferrel, Ramón Ramírez, Juan Mendoza, and Larry Kleinman) funded their WVIP work through a variety of means, including Spanish interpreting for the courts, working as a high school guidance counselor, and a multitude of part-time positions. With the later formation of PCUN in 1985, the staff finally received funding to pay salaries for the first time.

During its first year of work, the WVIP challenged the coerced confession technique used during detentions by the INS. Workers arrested at a camp near Troutdale by the INS and released from jail through WVIP intervention were allowed to stay in the country indefinitely, pending appeals of their cases. In 1978 the Willamette Valley Immigration Project moved their permanent office to Woodburn where they continued to work with documented and undocumented workers. A significant step was taken in 1980 when the WVIP purchased its own building and moved to its Young Street site in Woodburn. A special Cinco de Mayo (Fifth of May)-Primero de Mayo (International Workers Day) celebration that year marked the move and the inauguration of the building.⁸ The Project—and later PCUN—continued the annual celebration of these two historic dates until 1992. The WVIP also sponsored other cultural and political events, including bringing Teatro Primavera from Los Angeles to perform at the annual Fiesta Mexicana in Woodburn. In 1981, the Project hosted a community meeting with Baldemar Velásquez, leader of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), which is based in the Midwest.

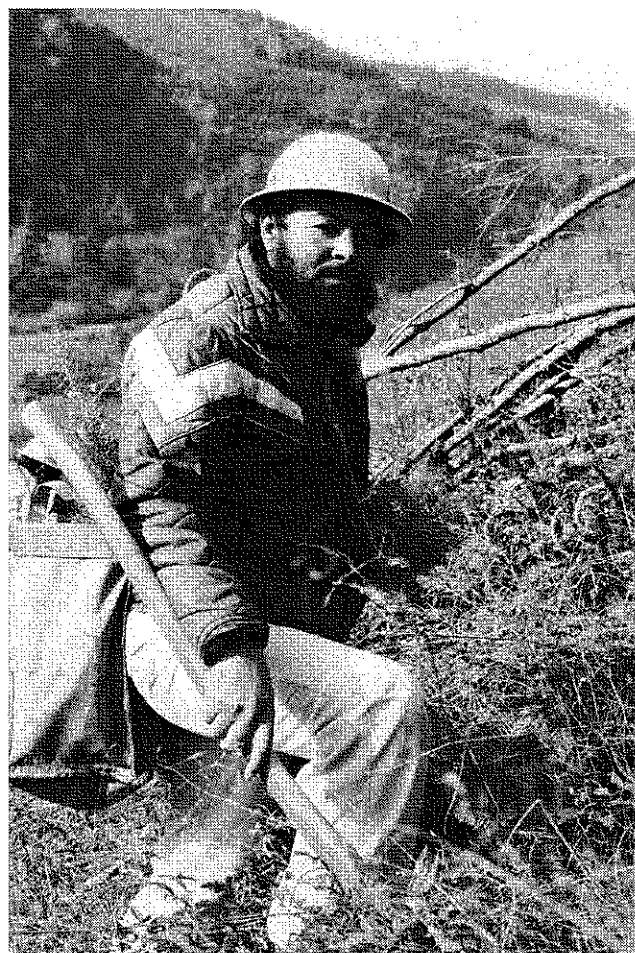
WVIP staff members established credibility with local farmworkers through their ongoing pressure on police and the INS to respect workers' legal rights. In October 1978, the organization made front page news when more than 100 workers were arrested in five days around Woodburn at the height of the cauliflower harvest. Larry Kleinman recalls this and another important local victory that helped to build credibility:

...This [the raids] even included one couple who went to the local daycare center to pick up their infant.... We were able to talk the INS out of actually deporting those people because they had this U.S. citizen child.... The reason the INS backed out is because the press showed up...and the reason the press showed up is because we got them there.... That raid was so intense that Governor Straub ended up calling the INS to tell them to back off and they either were done or they backed off. I don't know which way it was. I think they were probably done anyway. But this [the advocacy of the WVIP] got noticed by everybody.... It got noticed in the community and got noticed in the media.

⁸Cinco de Mayo is marked in Mexico to celebrate the 1862 battle at Puebla, Mexico, where a handful of Mexican militiamen fought off the conquering French troops who had invaded Mexico.

Working with Reforestation Workers

In the early 1980s, staff from the WVIP concentrated their efforts on working with reforestation workers. Between March 1981 and April 1982, they interviewed 100 reforestation workers and documented their difficult labor conditions. At the time of the survey, the reforestation workforce was about 80 percent Mexican. The survey revealed that 44 percent of workers spoke no English, that more than half worked a six-day week, that 61 percent reported that their wages did not rise with experience, that 22 percent were paid with no accounting of deductions, and that 23 percent indicated that their contractor had on some occasion threatened to call the Immigration Service and seek deportation of workers. Only 29 percent of those injured (among those who were interviewed) had ever filed a claim for compensation and 69 percent reported that their contractors did not have workers compensation insurance.



Oregon treeplanter, 1985.

The goal of working with reforestation workers was to begin building a union. It took almost five years to launch the union because the staff of WVIP could not devote themselves to the task full time (as they held a variety of other

jobs) and because the workers were the victims of a strong backlash by what PCUN staff have called “ex-hippie white reforestation workers” who were disgruntled with what they perceived as their displacement by Mexican farmworkers. At the time there were two categories of workers in the reforestation industry: Mexicans, employed primarily through Tejano (Mexican-Americans from Texas) and some Russian contractors, and white workers, primarily organized into cooperatives—such as one based in Eugene called the Hoedads, which had a membership of approximately 600 workers. During the off-season, the Mexican treeplanters often worked for the same contractors in nurseries, farmwork, and canneries. Many of them resided in the Willamette Valley. They had originally come from places like Michoacán, Jalisco and Guanajuato—all regions located in central Mexico.

Many workers were originally recruited by farm contractors who later went into reforestation. In the mid-1970s and increasingly in the late 1970s, contractors working with Mexican farmworkers began to bid on government contracts for treeplanting. Because they paid the Mexican laborers lower wages, they could intentionally underbid other contractors—specifically those with Anglo crews. According to Larry Kleinman, some of the bids dropped by as much as 50 percent in this process. Coops and other groups such as the Association of Reforestation Contractors were alarmed at this trend. Originally, WVIP organizers approached groups like the Hoedads and proposed a collaborative strategy to undercut the low bidding. PCUN president Ramón Ramírez recalls that this process had a very bad outcome for Mexican reforestation workers:

So once the Russian contractors and the Tejano contractors started seeing that there was a lot of money to be made out there, they started underbidding the coops...by a lot of money. These unscrupulous contractors were hiring undocumented workers and they were violating not only minimum wage laws, but all kinds of labor laws. And so what the coops started doing was to organize a counter-offensive to that. So they contact us to see how we could help them. And all we said was, “Why don’t you get Mexican workers into your crews?” Well, they didn’t want to do that. They wanted a real easy solution, right? And for them the easy solution was to call the INS. And so that’s what they started doing.

Other PCUN founders recall that there were some progressive elements within the Hoedad cooperative who tried to convince their peers that working towards unionization and solidarity with the Mexican treeplanters was a better solution than pitting one group against the other. Unfortunately, their efforts were unsuccessful.

By 1982, the INS increased arrests of treeplanters in Oregon and Washington. The raids had become a focal point for inter-agency cooperation between the U.S. Forest Service Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Department of Labor, the INS, and the Oregon Bureau of Labor and

Industries. The Northwest Forest Workers Association (NFWFA—a coordinating body of cooperatives) also collaborated with agency efforts targeting migrant farmworkers. In May of 1982, the INS arrested 350 workers along camps and roadblocks on Highway 99E. One hundred and twenty workers were arrested in Woodburn in eight days. In addition, INS agents raided labor camps and checked cars for undocumented people on highways. The INS even took children into custody during these raids, arresting a seventy-year-old grandmother and six of her grandchildren between the ages of two and ten as they swept through the Canby-Woodburn area (McKenzie 1982). The Willamette Valley Immigration Project obtained the release of eight of the workers, six without bail. As many as 256 people arrested were immediately bussed to Tijuana, many without pay. WVIP staff and other groups protested the treatment of those arrested in a demonstration in front of the INS building in Portland.

Despite defeat of an Oregon senate bill which sought to bring employer sanctions against those who hired undocumented laborers, the INS continued its campaigns of raids in 1983 and 1984. During this period, staff from the WVIP had successfully formed an organizing committee for a future union among the treeplanters. But as Larry Kleinman recalls, "Almost all of our organizing committee was arrested and deported overnight.... So we almost had to start over and that [the raids] created a tremendous chill, a real chilling effect about standing up for those kind of rights."

Opposing Efforts to Reinvent the Bracero Program in the 1980s

In addition to its work with reforestation workers, WVIP staff members also worked at the national level to try to improve the legal and political climate for Mexican workers. Throughout the early and mid-1980s, the U.S. congress discussed various proposals regarding the relationship between the large number of undocumented workers in the United States and the dependence of U.S. growers on Mexican labor. The proposed solutions ranged from a total amnesty for all undocumented workers to reinvention of the problematic Bracero Program begun during World War II. Advocates for workers were actively networking at the national level to prevent any legislation that would make the situation of farmworkers even worse. WVIP staff were an active part of this process.

The piece of legislation proposed to solve the "undocumented problem" was the Simpson-Mazzoli Immigration Reform and Control Act debated in Congress in 1982 and 1983 and subsequently again in 1984 and 1985. The bill was modified throughout these four years of debate. Staff from the WVIP were active in the fight to defeat the Simpson-

Mazzoli legislation.⁹ A major point of protest was the inclusion of employer sanctions to make employers liable for hiring undocumented workers (ultimately included in the 1986 legislation signed into law). Many felt that such sanctions would result in open discrimination against people who "appeared" Latino, whether or not they were undocumented. The bill also offered only limited amnesty to undocumented workers. In contrast, the WVIP pushed for a general amnesty for all undocumented workers. In addition, the original proposal also called for creating an experimental guestworker program which would bring in 50,000 Mexicans as contract laborers each year, similar to the Bracero Program from World War II. Opponents were against this provision because they wanted to avoid repetition of the injustices and dismal working conditions suffered by braceros under the earlier program, particularly in the mid-to-late 1950s when the protections that were supposed to be offered to Braceros existed in name only with no enforcement. The Project's political position against the Simpson-Mazzoli proposals was shared by many Latino groups across the nation who vowed to "Stop Reagan's Bracero Program" (as the proposed legislation was called). Ramón Ramírez was active in national campaigns against the Reagan immigration law. Ultimately, a revised version of the Simpson-Mazzoli bill was signed into law by Ronald Reagan in 1986 as the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). It did not include a new guestworker program, but did contain the provision regarding employer sanctions.¹⁰

⁹During this same time period in 1982-1983, WVIP staff also joined in a struggle to defeat an Oregon bill aimed at eliminating undocumented workers from the reforestation industry.

¹⁰The content of the 1986 IRCA is further described in the following section under the sub-heading, "The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act: Helping Farmworkers Apply for Amnesty."

Part III

Establishing a Union and Broadening its Base (1985–88)

THE FIRST FEW YEARS OF LIFE IN PCUN focused primarily on the two major areas of devising and implementing internal structures, and increasing membership. PCUN's founders developed bylaws and a dues and services system, created the board of directors and committees, initiated membership meetings, and completed nonprofit incorporation and other official actions. Within weeks after PCUN members approved the dues system at PCUN's second convention, congress passed legalization programs which would benefit thousands of undocumented immigrants in Oregon and millions on a national level. The dues system was particularly significant because it included a "services for members only" policy, causing PCUN's membership to swell from 200 in November 1986 to over 2,000 eighteen months later. It also changed the composition of membership from mostly reforestation workers to overwhelmingly farmworkers. By 1988, this change would profoundly influence PCUN's organizing priorities and strategies.



Strawberry worker in 1986.

The Founding of PCUN in 1985

The eight-year track record of the Willamette Valley Immigration Project was key to building trust in the farmworker and treeplanter communities so that an open

discussion of a farmworker union could begin. Moving from this foundation, an intense series of logistical and strategy discussions began among the staff of the WVIP, reforestation workers, and farmworkers during 1984 and early 1985. Larry Kleinman recalls:

We had serious logistical and strategy meetings with a group of twenty-five workers all together, including different committees. We decided to hold a meeting in Salem at the end of April in 1985 where we had about eighty to eighty-five people. Basically the question we were asking was, "Do we need to have an organization of reforestation and farmworkers, yes or no? And are you and yours committed to do this?" So we choose an interim leadership of four people and then we started working with them to have a founding convention in September of 1985.

The result of the meeting in April of 1985 was the formation of *Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste*. The initial goal of PCUN was to unite and organize to change working conditions for treeplanters and farmworkers. The staff from the WVIP became the PCUN staff. The WVIP also continued their important immigration work through PCUN and changed their name to become the service arm of PCUN, now known as the *Centro de Servicios para Campesinos* (Service Center for Farmworkers). The board of directors was elected from among the members and included a president, two vice presidents, a secretary-treasurer, and five general board members. There were several functioning committees including communication, services and membership, and organizing.

Finally, after five months of successful preparation and meetings about organizational structure, membership, and benefits, PCUN was ready to call its first national convention. The first PCUN President, Agustín Valle, sent out a letter of invitation to many for the convention, which took place on September 15th, 1985. He reminded those invited, "This day has great significance for us Mexicans. It was on this day in 1819 that the Mexican people demanded their independence. In this same spirit, we will come together to also demand our legitimate rights as workers."

In December of 1985, César Chávez visited Woodburn at the invitation of PCUN. He told PCUN members that

economic pressure is the only message to which growers listen. Consequently, he said that farmworkers must "strike and boycott and create a lot of economic pressure on growers" (McManus 1985:1). He also urged support for the reinstated grape boycott. "Farmers treat farmworkers like farm implements, rather than human beings," said Chávez, "if farmworkers don't get organized, farmworkers are going to continue to have the farmer's foot on our necks and we'll be fighting the same battle 100 years from now" (Castañeda 1985:1).



César Chávez with PCUN board in December 1985.

The second annual convention of PCUN was held in September 1986 and had Dolores Huerta as the keynote speaker. Telegrams and letters of support for PCUN came in from far and near. Baldemar Velásquez, the President of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) wrote, as did other supporters. The membership of PCUN approved a system of dues established at nine dollars per quarter¹¹ and included an insurance policy which paid \$3000 in case of the death of a member. Another key service offered to members was representation in immigration affairs.

The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act: Helping Farmworkers Apply for Amnesty

In November of 1986, President Reagan signed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which allowed those who had been living undocumented in the U.S. since January 1, 1982, to apply for amnesty and legal temporary residency, and then permanent residency. In addition, any person who worked in agriculture for ninety days between the period of May 1, 1985, through May 1, 1986, could receive temporary residence and later permanent resident status through the Special Agricultural Workers program

¹¹Today dues are twenty-seven dollars per quarter.

(SAW). Because a major part of what PCUN and WVIP had been offering to farmworkers and treeplanters was legal representation in immigration affairs, the new law brought a tremendous demand for their services, particularly from those qualifying for amnesty under the agricultural provisions of SAW.

Within days of IRCA's enactment, PCUN held a number of large forums attended by more than 800 people in Woodburn, Salem, Independence, and other locations in Oregon. Larry Kleinman discussed the intense work PCUN began to go through in response to IRCA and the possibilities for undocumented workers to receive amnesty and permanent residence:

Everyone was sent to us because we are the primary organization [in 1986]. We have eight years now in the community, and legalization hits. IRCA was signed November 6th, and we did back to back forums on the 7th, 8th, and 9th of November.... People were hungry for amnesty. The fear was there, even more so than today in some ways because the fear of immigration raids had just become endemic. So the idea that there would be some kind of relief from that terror really brought people out.

The first meetings focused on informing people about the different ways that undocumented people could apply for U.S. residency under the 1986 law. PCUN staff also warned people about potential discrimination against Latino workers because of the employer sanctions included in the IRCA legislation. The legislation required that employers check the residence and identity of every new employee to make sure that they had legal permission to work. As of the 1986 legislation, employers who knowingly hire, recruit, or refer for a fee undocumented workers can face fines of up to \$10,000 and criminal penalties of up to six months in jail.¹² Latino workers feared additional discrimination from employers who might think that all people of Latino descent "looked undocumented" and would therefore be reluctant to hire them. Ramón Ramírez passionately remembered the concern regarding discrimination:

What we really were talking about was the sanctions [against employers]. These would create wholesale discrimination. There is a double standard in this country in terms of Latinos and people of color applying for jobs and white people—everyone knows it. Even the Government Accounting Office in a study said, "Yeah, we are seeing discrimination, discriminatory practices."

¹²Ironically, the employer sanction provision of the IRCA legislation has been very weakly enforced since 1986. INS officials often argue that they spend most of their enforcement budget going after "big criminals" like drug smugglers and do not have the resources to enforce the employer sanctions. The alternative view is that it is widely understood that growers are dependent on undocumented labor and that enforcing the employer sanctions is a politically unpopular action to take and one that could affect the budget of the INS in Washington, because the agricultural lobby would be upset by any real enforcement of these sanctions.

In many meetings, leader Cipriano Ferrel pointed out that while some undocumented workers would not qualify for amnesty because they arrived in the U.S. after 1981, many workers would qualify, but might have difficulty collecting the required documents and evidence. Ramón Ramírez pointed out the contradiction of asking people who were undocumented to suddenly document their existence: "All this time, people have been living underground, and now they have to produce these documents" (Guerrero 1986:C1).

During 1987, PCUN and the Centro de Servicios Para Campesinos (CSC—Service Center for Farmworkers) staff devoted most of their time to working with those seeking amnesty through the IRCA and SAW programs. By the summer of 1987, PCUN and the CSC had a combined staff of ten. With this small staff, they managed to process 1300 legalization cases from June 1987 to June 1988, representing at that point more than 10 percent of the total cases in the state. Their work in this area also significantly increased their membership: in the period from October of 1986 to June of 1988, PCUN signed up nearly 2000 new members.

By their third annual convention in 1987, PCUN had shifted their organizing efforts from working primarily with reforestation workers to farm and nursery workers. The organization also registered with the state of Oregon as a nonprofit organization, and in 1988 with the U.S. Department of Labor as a labor organization. At the third convention, Cipriano Ferrel was elected president. The year 1987 also included an effort to expand the Worker-Right-to-Know Act of 1985, which required informing employers and employees of the dangers of hazardous chemicals found in the workplace. The 1985 law excluded farmworkers. PCUN and other organizations gave testimony in public hearings about farmworkers exposed to pesticides, and this issue became the centerpiece of a special PCUN project beginning in 1988.

Project to Stop Pesticide Poisoning

Oregon's agricultural industry is dependent upon pesticides: "In 1987, the last year an industry-wide pesticide use survey was conducted, Oregon growers used an estimated 16 million pounds of pesticides" (PCUN website). Farmworkers are often required to tolerate unsafe working conditions which may include a lack of safety equipment for administering pesticides, repeated exposure to pesticides while working, and no information about what kind of pesticides are used in the fields. Farmworker children who live on or near farms where pesticides are used are subject to pesticide drift in their yards, sand boxes, swing sets, wading pools, and other play areas. They, as well as their parents who work in the fields, face short-term acute effects of pesticide poisoning including skin rashes, systematic poisoning and even death. Long-term chronic effects include cancer, damage to the brain and nervous system, birth defects, and infertility (PCUN website).

In 1988, PCUN started the Project to Stop Pesticide Poisoning in an attempt to quantify the amount, type, and effects of chemicals used on selected farms, to document pesticide exposures, and to educate farmworkers to report pesticide use and exposure to PCUN. The project has worked to enact effective "right to know" legislation, which would require a mandatory national pesticide use reporting system for all users that would include all active and inert ingredients in all products. The project has documented the unsafe use of pesticides on Oregon farms on videotape, has assembled a medical and legal team to pursue possible exposure cases, and has organized training sessions with nationally renowned pesticide expert, Dr. Marion Moses, who directs the national Pesticide Education Center in San Francisco.



Ramón Ramírez, Javier Ceja, Cipriano Ferrel, and Agustín Valle announcing the incorporation of PCUN in 1987.

Part IV

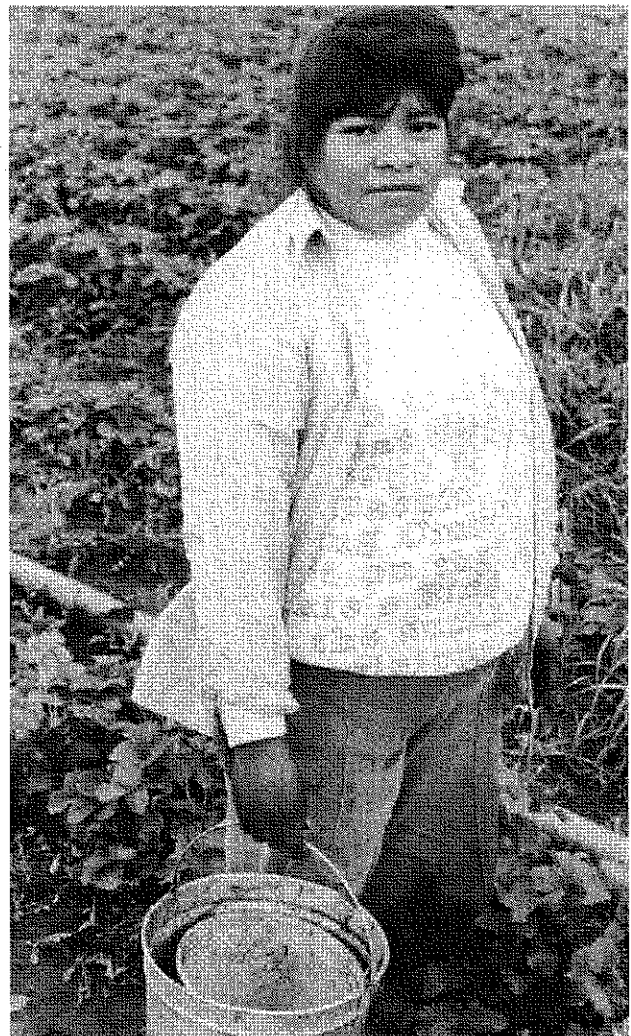
The Struggle to Achieve Collective Bargaining Becomes Central (1988–91)

ON AUGUST 22, 1988, more than 300 farmworkers marched three miles on a hot Sunday afternoon through the streets of Woodburn. Another 300 joined them at a rally at a downtown parking lot in the heart of the Latino business district. Plummeting wages and scarce work had left workers angry and desperate, and the march and rally reflected years of pent-up frustration about low pay and unjust working conditions. Furthermore, it set in motion a crusade to change the agricultural labor system—a struggle which continues, ever-stronger, to this day. Within three years of that Sunday, the campaigns for collective bargaining rights would reach the Oregon legislature, the media, the federal court, and the picket lines at the first union organized strike in the history of Oregon farm labor.

PCUN Moves Out of Amnesty Work and Focuses on Raising Wages for Farmworkers

While amnesty work had been a focal point during 1987, 1988 brought a major focus on the economic conditions and poverty of farmworkers. It was a very bad year. Wages dropped an average of 30 to 50 percent, and the amount of work available to the average farmworker also dropped by more than 50 percent. The Woodburn area was flooded with people looking for work that did not exist, many of whom arrived early and slept wherever they could find space. In one instance, up to fifty-five migrants were packed into a barn.

In mid-1988, PCUN announced that it would suspend its legal work helping those who applied for temporary residency under the SAW and amnesty programs. This decision was made after contractors and growers lured workers to Oregon with the false promise of a letter which would allow them to receive temporary residency. PCUN organizers no longer felt they could be associated with the legalization program when it was being used to exploit workers with false promises, false documents, and false hopes. In addition, PCUN staff believed that there was clear evidence to indicate that some growers were luring an over-supply of workers to the Willamette Valley that summer in order to



Strawberry worker fortunate to have work in 1988.

lower wages. While not all growers were guilty of this practice, all benefited. Larry Kleinman remembers of 1988, "In June of 1988 we pulled out of legalization. We were not doing any more of that because the growers had completely manipulated that to increase the labor supply...so it was a huge surplus of labor that year and strawberry prices went down to seven cents a pound. People were working an hour a day. There were a hundred workers on a one-acre field."

In August of 1988, PCUN organized a major march of hundreds of workers through Woodburn demanding justice for farmworkers. The earlier part of the summer had been marked by a visit from presidential candidate Jessie Jackson to Woodburn at the request of the PCUN leadership. Jackson publicly pledged his support for the right of farmworkers to unionize and have their unions recognized by growers. These public events built on the miserable conditions farmworkers faced that year. In September 1988, PCUN moved into the church building it still occupies today at 300 Young St. in Woodburn.



Fourth Annual PCUN Convention, 1988.

The unemployment and poverty that workers were dealing with also drove PCUN members forward with their plans to focus on collective bargaining and raising wages. In June of 1989, the Oregon legislature passed a bill to increase Oregon's minimum wage in three stages to \$4.75 per hour by summer 1991, resulting in pay raises for some migrant workers. However, the bill excluded farmworkers who commuted to the fields and who had worked less than thirteen weeks in farm labor during the previous year. The result was a confusing set of conditions with clear discrimination against those who did seasonal work, such as pruning Christmas trees and other plants.

In order to document that wages for farmworkers were below the minimum, PCUN organizers surveyed farmworkers during the summer harvest season of 1989. Ramón Ramírez talked about why they began the survey: "In 1989, we were noticing that there...was a big problem in terms of growers paying the minimum wage. Growers were paying by piece rate so they were paying the workers what they would pick, but never made up the difference if they were underpaid [by not making the minimum wage based on what they picked per hour]. We found a lot of underpayment." Their report, released in December of 1989, found that workers received an average of \$4.03 per hour for nursery work and \$3.50 per hour for fieldwork. However, they also found that fully 95 percent of the workers surveyed were paid less than the minimum wage of \$3.35 per hour on at least one occasion. They found that almost

all berry and cucumber workers were shortchanged. Fifty percent of berry and cucumber harvesters did not receive the minimum of \$3.35 per hour on their average workday. Over the summer, wages lost possibly totaled more than two million dollars because minimum wage laws were not enforced.

The Legal Struggle for Collective Bargaining Rights and the Right to Picket

During that same year, PCUN worked hard with others to promote a legislative bill which would extend collective bargaining rights to farmworkers. This would have allowed workers similar protections as those provided by the 1975 Agricultural Labor Relations Act of California. The proposed bill called for union elections within seven days of filing to be a bargaining agent with the Employment Relations Board (an existing state agency), for elections to be held only when at least 50 percent of the employer's peak workforce was on the job, for bilingual ballots to be supplied to union members, and for prompt post-election hearings to be held to resolve any challenges to the election or the legitimacy of the union. The effort to pass the bill was focused on demonstrating both the second-class status of farmworkers as workers in the state, as well as their need for unionization. The bill gained the sponsorship of 25 percent of the legislators and of both majority leaders. The campaign brought PCUN new visibility and credibility, especially with other unions.

In the process of organizing to pass this bill, PCUN organizers discovered a 1963 law barring people who are not "regular" employees from picketing while planting or harvesting is in progress. When the collective bargaining bill proponents fell one vote short of the sixteen vote majority needed for favorable action by the full senate slate, PCUN took up another strategy. On September 1, 1989, they filed a suit against Oregon governor Neil Goldschmidt. Thirteen plaintiffs led by PCUN argued that a state law that forbid picketing by any but "regular employees" of a farm interfered with the free-speech rights of workers and supporters. They stated that Oregon is the only state that restricts the right of farm laborers to picket, and therefore also prevents workers from mounting effective strikes if necessary to obtain social and economic justice. PCUN president Cipriano Ferrel stated at the time, "We're hoping to create economic pressure... It's the only leverage that farmworkers have" (Francis 1989). Both the proposed collective bargaining legislation and the suit against the governor marked the first time in at least sixteen years that serious discussion had been conducted in the Oregon senate about extending collective bargaining rights to farmworkers. In September 1990, PCUN won a major victory: U.S. District Judge James Redden declared that the twenty-seven year-old Oregon

anti-picketing law that restricted worksite picketing during the planting or harvesting of perishable crops was unconstitutional. Governor Neil Goldschmidt, the defendant in the case, opted not to appeal. This decision was a significant step in improving the conditions for collective bargaining in Oregon.

La Hora Campesina: Bringing Radio to PCUN Members

In an effort to better disseminate information about the union to the public and to increase communication among union members, PCUN began a weekly one hour radio show in March of 1990 called "La Hora Campesina" ("The Farmworker Hour"). The show was broadcast on KWBY and had a lively format, with farmworkers calling in to freely share information with each other. Long-time PCUN member Javier Ceja, who served on the original board and worked on the radio program, recalls how this open format eventually caused problems when the growers tuned in:

People would call up and they would explain to me [on the air] everything that was going on. And then I would ask them more questions and we would keep talking. Sometimes people would name names...like who they worked for...like the so and so farm. They would talk about their living conditions, how much they were paid. They would talk about everything.... This is what caused us problems, like when they talked about the work conditions.... People would say that this grower didn't pay them well, that he paid them really cheap.... So maybe it was the contractors who heard it [the radio show] or people who understand Spanish and told the growers.



Javier Ceja, Larry Kleinman, and another PCUN member during the airing of "La Hora Campesina".

In July 1990, KWBY abruptly canceled La Hora Campesina, saying that it unfairly charged a Mount Angel farmer with labor violations without giving the farmer a chance to respond. PCUN offered equal time to the grower,

but KWBY owner Cliff Zauner refused to reconsider. PCUN took the radio station to court in order to win the right to keep airing the show. PCUN contended that KWBY violated a contractual agreement by canceling a show without fifteen days notice. At the end of July, a Marion County Circuit Court judge ordered KWBY to air at least two more installments of La Hora Campesina. PCUN aired two more hours of the show at KWBY and then moved the program to KBOO in Portland. The program continued airing there until June 1994. PCUN members and staff engineered the show and frequently taped interviews in a makeshift studio at PCUN headquarters in Woodburn for broadcast.

The Ongoing Struggle to Raise Farmworker Wages: Making Concrete Gains for Workers

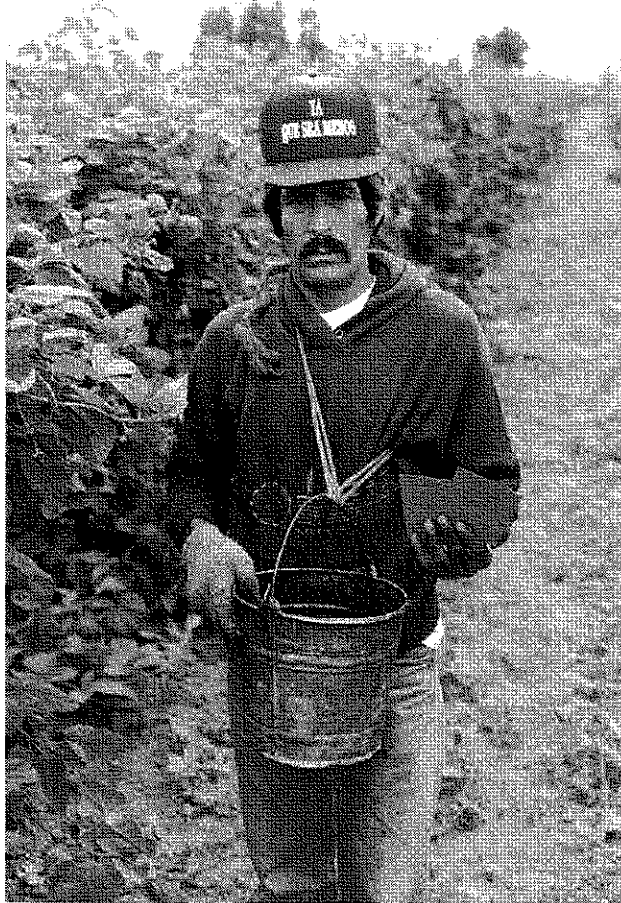
During the summer of 1990, PCUN activists conducted a "red card wage campaign" to help workers keep track of their earnings. Workers were given red cards to record their daily earnings. Totals were kept and compared to pay stubs. PCUN organizers distributed more than 10,000 time cards and were able to document 250 cases of workers receiving less than the minimum wage. PCUN filed wage claims with the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industry for forty workers who were eventually awarded more than \$3,000 collectively in compensation for their lost wages. PCUN was also able to force Kraemer Farms labor contractor Pancho de la Cruz to pay back \$9,000 that he had illegally withheld from farmworker paychecks through inflated charges for housing, food, and transportation. Ramón Ramírez recalls:

We targeted five farmers...and Kraemer was the top one. All the workers would complain They came here all the way from Mount Angel, you know, just to complain about the Kraemers. I remember we talked to him that year. We said, "What's the deal man?" The Kraemers had this labor contractor.... He would bring workers up here, most of the workers he brought were Mixteco.¹³ He would charge them for rides, for food.... He would feed them stuff like tacos de arroz [rice tacos]. And he would charge them \$40 per week for food, for tacos de arroz.... The Kraemers would give him a check and so what he was doing is that he would have a list of how much money you owe, then you'd sign your check and give it to him. He'd cash it for you and maybe give you back the difference of what you owe.... So that year, you know, we submitted over 100 wage claims to Kraemer. Then we won \$9,000. And we were able to develop this good relationship with probably about three or four crews.

¹³Mixtecs are an indigenous group who originate in the states of Oaxaca and Guerrero in southern Mexico. Mixtec is one of 52 distinctive indigenous languages spoken in Mexico. In 1995, the National Institute of Statistics, Geography, and Information (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática) reported that there were 389,957 Mixtec speakers in Mexico. See their web site at <http://www.inegi.gob.mx/>

These concrete gains made a positive impression on people like Macedonio Mejía, a farmworker from Michoacán who began to work with PCUN in the late 1980s. After receiving residency through the 1986 IRCA legislation, PCUN helped him bring the rest of his family to the United States. He discusses PCUN's work on raising the minimum wage and staking wage claims:

I have seen through different experiences that they [PCUN] have helped a lot of the time and they have done a lot to help the community. I mean the farmworkers.... Here, the minimum wages were not rising and the growers just made us work.... They didn't pay hardly any salary at all, but they [PCUN] got involved and they asked about our salaries and they raised salaries for the entire community and asked that the growers respect us. Now they respect us more because of the work they did.



Worker in berry fields during the Red Card Campaign.

Continued Steps Towards Collective Bargaining: A Hiring Hall and Oregon's First-Ever Union-Organized Farmworker Strike

In May 1991, PCUN opened the first farmworker hiring hall ever operated in Oregon. The hiring hall was an attempt to curtail the abuses of contractors who were charging high fees for services, as well as luring workers to the Willamette Valley with false promises of high wages and abundant work. PCUN President Cipriano Ferrel sent letters to thirteen area growers inviting them to consider utilizing the hiring hall. The hiring hall functioned by signing up PCUN members who were available to work and then sending them to growers to sign a basic agreement, which included the following conditions: recognizing PCUN as the workers' representative; requiring that workers only be disciplined or dismissed for just cause; respecting seniority; and establishing a procedure to be used to resolve any disputes (PCUN Update, May 1991). While several growers expressed interest in meeting with PCUN representatives, many growers remained strongly opposed to farmworker unionization and pressured each other not to use the hiring hall. Consequently, the idea was prevented from becoming a reality.

In June 1991, PCUN followed up their minimum wage campaign from the previous year. While no major wage violations were found, there were instances of piece-rate earnings not reaching the \$4.75 hourly minimum. In late June, workers organized a work stoppage on Kraemer Farms and won an increase from fifteen to twenty cents per pound for the later strawberry pickings. In July, PCUN organizers began holding formal meetings in Kraemer's main labor camp and workers voted to form a committee, elect representatives, and to demand \$6.50 per hour. They also directed their representatives, with PCUN assistance, to begin negotiating with the Kraemers. A few days later, Dan Kraemer rejected a proposed negotiation meeting and brought in a county sheriff deputy to question PCUN's right to be there.

On Friday, August 9th, 1991, worker committee representatives asked to negotiate about wage concerns for the cucumber harvest. When the Kraemers refused to meet, the worker representatives decided to go on strike the next day. Saturday, August 10th, marked the first farmworker strike in Oregon since 1971. It was also the first time ever that a union had organized a farmworker strike in the history of Oregon—there had been previous work stoppages, but never a union-organized strike action. PCUN targeted Kraemer farms for the strike because of the high level of complaints PCUN staff received about bad working conditions, particularly about workers not being paid the minimum wage and having difficulty monitoring their earnings. On the first day of the strike, over 100 picketers assembled at field entrances. Only ten workers crossed the picket lines.

Rafael Delgado, a Kraemer Farms striker from Guerrero, Mexico stated of the strike:

We will continue our struggle to maintain our families who await us in Mexico—our children, our brothers and sisters, our parents, and even our grandparents. We fight to win for our elders everything they deserve because they have passed a strong tradition on to us. Others may put us down because we're short and brown-skinned, but we have a strong spirit. Kraemer Farms has exploited us and treated us badly. All we ask is just wages and fair treatment. We mustn't lose heart because we will win this struggle so that tomorrow, our children and our countrymen who come to work at Kraemer Farms will be treated more justly. (PCUN Update, August 1991).

During the second day of the strike, picketers returned and seventy-five of the original 100 cucumber workers continued to support and respect the strike, leaving an entire field without pickers. The Kraemers ordered sheriffs to arrest PCUN President Cipriano Ferrel, crew representative Timoteo López García, and PCUN Secretary-Treasurer Larry Kleinman on trespassing charges. Two Kraemer Farms supervisors who drove into the picket line and knocked down two PCUNistas were not charged.



Then PCUN vice president Ramón Ramírez and intern Leone Bicchieri in a discussion with sheriffs during the Kraemer strike.

According to PCUN staff, Ramón Ramírez negotiated with the Kraemers and reached an oral agreement on the second day of the strike. The terms of the agreement included payment of seventy cents per bucket of cucumbers and a guarantee that there would be no retaliation against strikers. A written version of this agreement was to be signed the following morning, but despite great pressure on the Kraemers, they repudiated the agreement and denied that they were going to sign a contract. However, they did raise worker wages 33 percent in response to the pressure. A fax sent by César Chávez in support of the strike read, in part:

I endorse your campaign at Kraemer Farms. Last week's strike represents an historic gain for Oregon farmworkers under the leadership of PCUN. The strike's success also underscores the importance of PCUN's court victory last fall, overturning the state anti-picketing law. Please tell my brothers, the workers who were on strike, that our struggle in California defending the gains farmworkers have made makes it impossible to be with them in person, but I am with you all in spirit. Farmworkers have gained anything of lasting value only through personal sacrifice. Your sacrifice of these recent days will surely make the future brighter for yourselves, for farmworkers in Oregon, and for future generations of our people (PCUN Update, August 1991).

Leading the first union-organized farmworker strike in Oregon history put PCUN on the map. The strike received significant media coverage—not only in the area, but also in national papers like USA Today—and many Oregon state officials commented on the strike. Perhaps the most revealing remark in the press was made by Bruce Anders, the state agricultural department director. "It sure as hell is going to send a note of fear through a lot of growers," he noted to reporter Grace Chimamoto of the Salem Statesman-Journal (Chimamoto 1991:A1). However, some local papers termed the strike a failure and a media campaign by Kraemer Farms lawyers attempted to discredit PCUN. Despite attempts by the Kraemers to claim that the strike collapsed, the strike made it clear that the goal of collective bargaining was a real one and that PCUN would continue to seriously pursue this goal. At its September 1991 convention, the AFL-CIO unanimously passed a resolution in support of PCUN's work and voted to contribute \$2,000 to the organization.

The year 1991 also marked another step in PCUN's attempt to move forward with "right to know" legislation about pesticides. During this year as well as in 1993, PCUN—in conjunction with the Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides (NCAP) and the Oregon State Public Interest Research Group (OSPIRG)—supported legislative attempts to allow farmworkers and community members to obtain pesticide information without farmworkers having to identify themselves to their employers. Neither attempt was successful (PCUN webpage).

Part V

The Collective Bargaining Struggle Widens (1992–95)

PPCUN's ORGANIZING INITIATIVES DURING this phase drew upon both the network of supporters (especially from labor and religious institutions) developed in legislative, legal, and field campaigns, as well as the network of workers developed in field organizing around issues of wages and working conditions. The boycott of NORPAC products launched in September 1992 provided a vehicle for the active participation of farmworker supporters everywhere. It also confronted the industry's centers of power in a more direct manner. The massive 1995 PCUN organizing—honoring the organization's tenth anniversary—demonstrated farmworker interest in change and their willingness to take action on a broad scale towards seeking redress for their grievances.

Building Pressure for Negotiation: The NORPAC and Steinfeld Boycotts

In 1992, PCUN continued to pursue negotiations with the Kraemers. In May, the Kraemers refused work to at least twenty-one of the workers who participated in the strike during 1991. At the request of the Kraemers, PCUN submitted a five-point plan in June of 1992 for improving working conditions in their fields. However, the Kraemers refused to negotiate the terms with PCUN through their attorney. Tensions rose over the summer after thirty PCUNistas and supporters protested at the main labor camp of Kraemer Farms, demanding that Kraemer disarm foremen who were believed to be carrying concealed weapons to intimidate workers.

PCUN organizers increased pressure on the Kraemers by writing both Steinfeld's Pickle Company and NORPAC, the largest processor of fruits and vegetables in the west and owned by 250 growers in the Willamette Valley. Because both of these organizations do business with Kraemer Farms, PCUN members requested them to pressure the Kraemer family to negotiate. PCUN then informed NORPAC and Steinfeld's that a boycott of their products might be called. After Kraemer employees again reiterated their demands—for a salary increase, a system to be able to file complaints without being fired, respect for seniority, the

prohibition of dismissal for unjustified causes, and a worker's committee to implement rules about housing—the workers endorsed the boycott, which was formally declared by PCUN members in September of 1992.

In 1992 and 1993, labor, student, and religious groups in the Northwest and around the country joined in to support the boycott of NORPAC (Santiam and FLAV-R-PAC Gardenburger and other products). By March of 1993, more than twenty-three organizations and 650 households had pledged to join the boycott. The food service department of Reed College (located in Portland, Oregon) agreed to stop using NORPAC and Steinfeld products in October. The year 1993 was also marked by the death in April of long-time farmworker leader César Chávez. In place of PCUN's yearly Cinco de Mayo celebration, the union sponsored a memorial service for Chávez that was attended by hundreds of people.



Child and his father at PCUN memorial for César Chávez in 1993.

In 1994, the boycott continued to build and a south-east Portland IGA grocery store agreed to stop selling NORPAC products. In 1996, PCUN called on farmworker supporters to boycott Wholesome & Hearty Foods because they refused to cease distribution of their product through NORPAC. The most popular Wholesome & Hearty Foods product was Gardenburger, served at many college campuses. The Gardenburger boycott proved to be a key tool in involving greater numbers of college students in the work of PCUN.

The Birth of the PCUN Women's Project

At the eighth annual convention of PCUN in 1992, a resolution demanded the creation of a PCUN women's project that would address conditions specific to farmworker women and develop stronger female leadership within the union. With few exceptions, the public face of the union had been largely male, although women had been working for many years as part of the staff and in the Service Center. Women were elected to the PCUN board starting at the 1987 convention, with consistent representation continuing until the present: in 1999, four of the nine directors on the board were women. Early women board members included Carmen Ramírez and María Espinoza.

Nevertheless, while some leaders such as Cipriano Ferrel supported the strong participation of women since the initiation of PCUN, other leaders resisted or were unsupportive. Long-time PCUN member and activist Javier Ceja recalled that during the early years of PCUN, some of the elected leadership was opposed to having women participate in the union:

I remember that we had a very strong discussion about whether or not the women could participate with the person who was elected president during the first convention. The president and the vice president were opposed to it. They said, "How is it possible that my wife will come here and be with all of these men?" That is how the discussion went. Cipriano used the best reasons to try and explain to them about the struggle and the importance of having women's participation, but they always felt like a woman shouldn't speak with other men...but finally women began to participate more in 1992 and 1993. It was a slow process, but there were more women volunteers...and at the same time there was another process that happened after people had their green cards for four or five years.... They started to bring their families [from Mexico] and so a lot of members who had green cards began to petition for residence for their wives and they brought them to the office. So this began a process during those years of more communication because there were more women there....

Susan Dobkins, current staff liaison with the Mujeres Luchadoras Progresistas (Women Fighting for Progress), also recalled 1992 and 1993 as years of transition in PCUN when women's issues first began to surface in the Service Center:

In the Service Center what we were noticing as early as '92 or '93...was that women...would come in with different problems, including domestic violence and just needed to talk to someone about it...and they would come here because PCUN really had a wide trust in the community, had developed that relationship over many years, and people saw us as a real resource.... What we noticed in our analysis...is that it really came down to an economic point...women feeling not able to be independent and not supported. So that's why we came down on the need to have a long-term project that's going to create space for women to develop skills to become more independent.... That doesn't mean dividing up families. It means supporting families. So that's where we knew from the get-go that it was going to be an economic project, but that's not where we started....

An initial women's project was begun with a class to help women get their learners' permits to drive. About five or six women signed up. Dobkins recalls, "Pretty soon we ran into issues of husbands being threatened by that. We had one woman who reported to us that her husband said, 'It's too dangerous for you to drive. I don't want you to learn how to drive, and besides...you might run off on me, once you learn how to drive.' So we just started grappling with these kinds of things, but also realized...this is a long-term project." This initial project was the starting point for what later became Mujeres Luchadoras Progresistas, officially formed in 1997.

PCUN Construction Projects: A Union Hall and Farmworker Housing

On the ninth anniversary of PCUN's founding (April 2, 1994), members dedicated their Union Hall to the memory of Edward and Sonia Risberg, two Jewish immigrants who were labor activists in Chicago. The ceremony capped nearly six years of effort on the part of PCUN to repair and remodel their permanent home, the Service Center, and the Willamette Valley Law Project (a nonprofit organization which sponsors much of PCUN's research and educational work). A benefit concert at Portland's Bensen High School, featuring Pete Seeger and his grandson Tao Rodríguez Seeger, attracted a standing-room only crowd of 1800 and raised more than \$27,000 for PCUN field organizing. The next evening during the dedication ceremony, Oregon governor Barbara Roberts hailed PCUN and Risberg Hall for "being about dignity, respect, equality, and contributing back" to Oregon (PCUN Update, May 1994). The dedication and concert brought together a wide network of sup-

port for PCUN and provided momentum for the tenth anniversary campaign.

Other construction projects were finished in 1994 as well. After three years of planning, fundraising, and construction, housing was offered to farmworker families through the opening of the Nuevo Amanecer (New Dawn) apartments, developed by the Farmworker Housing Development Corporation (an independent nonprofit organization in Woodburn cofounded by PCUN in 1990). PCUN President Cipriano Ferrel, PCUN board member Job Pozos, and other PCUN activists were key players in the project. The initial phase was completed in March 1994 and provided homes for forty-eight families. Construction continued to ultimately provide ninety-two farmworker families with housing.

"Aumento Ya!"—PCUN's Tenth Anniversary Campaign to Raise Strawberry Wages

In April of 1995, PCUN held its tenth convention, where members unified behind the organizing committee's recommendation to seek a wage increase for strawberry workers. The membership endorsed the demand of seventeen cents per pound for the 1995 strawberry harvest. This would substantially raise the wage rate for the first pick above the traditional ten to twelve cents per pound, as well as provide a precedent to raise wages in other crops. After the assembly, PCUN sent letters to area growers after the beginning of the demand and inviting them to discuss it before the beginning of the harvest. By the end of May, PCUN had the signatures of 1,200 workers who pledged to support the demand for an increase. They also began to publicize the campaign in Oregon using trilingual radio spots in Spanish, Mixteco, and Trique. This strategy was key to reaching the increasing number of indigenous farmworkers in Oregon whose first language was not Spanish. Since the mid-1990s, indigenous Mexican farmworkers have formed an increasing part of PCUN's membership, accounting for more than one-third of all members in the late 1990s. PCUN also sent organizers to Madera, California to alert workers headed for Oregon about the campaign. At the same time, PCUN organizers began to visit labor camps to talk to workers about the upcoming campaign. On the last day of May, a fifty-foot long, five-foot high banner reading, "Strawberry Workers Demand a Raise," was posted above Woodburn's I-5 overpass.

The first strike action came at Moorhouse Farms in Molalla. Moorhouse refused to negotiate on June 2nd, the first day of harvest, so workers left the field and began picketing. The following day, picketing continued. Organizers were able to convince 200 workers at more than three labor camps to honor the strike and refuse to board labor contractor vans heading into Moorhouse fields. The picketing

at Moorhouse Farms continued through June 20th at a lower level, but hundreds of "drive-in" workers were turned away, leaving the farm short of labor and costing tens of thousands of dollars in lost revenue.

While the Moorhouse picketing continued, a four day strike also began at Spring Lake Farms and Zielinski Farms, both near Brooks. On the second day of picketing, Zielinski agreed to meet with the workers' council (formed by workers during the strike), but negotiations broke down when he demonstrated bad faith. In the meantime, workers increased the pressure on him by bannering and picketing his house. They also decided to rename their labor camp as Campo Benito Juárez, in reference to Mexico's indigenous president who drove the French out of Mexico in 1857. Bartolomé García, one of 100 migrant farmworkers who refused to pick at Spring Lake Farm's strawberry fields as part of the PCUN strawberry campaign, stated, "You can work as hard as you can and still make poor wages" (Taylor 1995:B2). García, whose hometown is Puerto Escondido, Oaxaca, continued "they [growers] don't notice that you work hard.... Maybe as the strawberries go bad they'll notice. Maybe now that [the union] is helping us, they'll stop taking us for granted" (Taylor 1995:B2).



Strikers at Camp Benito Juárez in 1995.

On a nearby farm, workers won an increase from fourteen to fifteen cents per pound on the first pick. Workers at Kraemer Farms and Norwood Farms, both in Cornelius, staged work stoppages and also won the same increase. By the end of the strawberry campaign, two major strikes and at least a dozen other work stoppages pushed growers to increase wages in the strawberry harvest by two to three cents per pound. This was a major accomplishment after strawberry wages had remained stagnant for almost ten years. PCUN estimated that farmworkers bolstered their earnings by 20 percent that summer, or close to one million dollars collectively. PCUN Secretary-Treasurer Larry Kleinman wrote of the campaign, "We have long advocated that the appropriate process to set wages and resolve work-related issues is at the bargaining table, rather than the picket line. This year, however, farmworkers by the thousands dem-

onstrated that growers' refusal to bargain will no longer be accepted and that growers who refuse to bargain risk economic loss" (Kleinman 1995). Farmworker Manuel Rivera, participant in the strawberry campaign, stated of his experience:

When I arrived in the state of Oregon, I came to a labor camp known as Campo Ramírez. During our strike we succeeded in renaming it Campo Benito Juárez. We arrived just in time for the strawberry harvest. In the strawberry fields we united all the workers from the labor camp in order to ask the contractor how much we were going to be paid per pound of strawberries. In an offensive manner the contractor responded that we were going to be paid twelve cents a pound, and if we didn't like it we could just get out of the camp. We made a difficult decision and decided to stay and face a fight in order to win a raise and obtain the respect which we deserved.... We spoke with PCUN in order to request help.... At the beginning, this fight at the camp was very hard to win. The rancher would always arrive at the camp with police and threaten to throw us out.... Because of deep needs, some of the *compañero* workers became discouraged and went to the rancher's field to work under whatever misery. Those of us who remained firm won benefits. We lived without paying rent for four weeks. We were able to work at other ranches where we were paid better, and also to gain compensation for the days that we were without work. We received the support of other unions. They helped us with food, blankets, and donations of money. And thus we won by the unity and decisions of the worker *compañeros* (Rivera 1995:4).

While no contracts were signed as a direct result of the campaign, the terrain for farmworkers underwent a significant shift as PCUN demonstrated its capacity to mobilize workers and exert pressure. The 1995 Tenth Anniversary Campaign was a critical and successful step towards the future signing of contracts. PCUN produced a video documenting this campaign titled, "Aumento Ya!" ("Raise Now!"), and in 1996 the video was featured in the Portland International Film and Video Festival. Free Speech-TV included "Aumento Ya!" in its programming broadcast on over sixty cable stations in two dozen cities. Some 1200 copies of the video were sold or distributed nationwide.

The Death of PCUN Founder Cipriano Ferrel and the Continued Realization of His Vision

In September of 1995, PCUN founder and president Cipriano Ferrel passed away suddenly from a heart attack, leaving many in shock. Four different gatherings were organized to remember and celebrate his life. Memorials were held in Woodburn and in Delano, California, where Ferrel was born. He worked with César Chávez in California before coming to Oregon to attend Colegio César Chávez and

become a cofounder of the Willamette Valley Immigration Project and PCUN. Cipriano also served on the board of directors for the Farmworker Housing Development Corporation and was a major player in the construction of Woodburn's Nuevo Amanecer farmworker apartments. Cipriano's vision of achieving collective bargaining rights for all farmworkers and the methods to achieve this vision—often drawing on lessons learned from the United Farm Workers where Cipriano developed his organizing skills—continue through the ongoing work of PCUN. He remains a vibrant symbol of the struggles won by PCUN.



United Farm Workers cofounder Dolores Huerta and PCUN president Ramón Ramírez speak to a crowd of 200 on October 6, 1996, in celebration of the First Annual Cipriano Ferrel Day. The occasion featured the opening of PCUN's library and archives, which were dedicated to Ferrel.

Part VI

Broadening the Movement to Meet the Resurgence of Labor and Immigration Issues (1996–2001)

EVEN AS ORGANIZING IN THE NORPAC boycott and in the fields was accelerating after the Tenth Anniversary Organizing Campaign, PCUN also undertook four major new initiatives in 1996 and 1997. The farmworker women's project contributed to the creation of a strong core of new leaders. *Voz Hispana* expressed the Latino community's discontent about disrespect and directed it into a successful campaign for recognition of César Chávez by the Woodburn School District. PCUN developed an innovative program of citizenship classes which enrolled hundreds of immigrants who were newly eligible for naturalization. And PCUN leaders spearheaded the creation of CAUSA—a statewide immigrants' rights coalition similar to one which the Willamette Valley Immigration Project had initiated and led in opposition to the Reagan and the Simpson-Mazzoli immigration plans of the early to mid-1980s. Taken together, these efforts exemplify PCUN's main strategy of combining focused projects and campaigns in a manner that addresses immediate basic needs, while also working for long-term fundamental change.

The Struggle to Defeat National Anti-Immigrant and Anti-Farmworker Legislation (1996–Present)

From 1996 to the present (2001), PCUN has been deeply involved in a national struggle to defeat proposals for a new Bracero Program and to push back restrictive new immigration legislation. In 1996, agribusiness lobbyists persuaded the House Agriculture Committee to add a temporary agricultural worker program to an immigration "reform" bill which became the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996. While the agribusiness amendment proposing admission of up to 250,000 agricultural guest workers per year was defeated, the larger piece of immigration legislation (IIRIRA) was passed. The defeat of the proposed new Bracero Program was only temporary. Separate legislative proposals to bring in guestworkers have continued every year since 1996.

IIRIRA legislation caused hardships for immigrants on

several levels. First, IIRIRA imposed a three to ten year "bar" or disqualification from legal immigration for many prospective legal immigrants, especially those who had resided undocumented in the United States and then departed from the United States for any reason or duration.¹⁴ Secondly, IIRIRA also made it more difficult for people to sponsor relatives to come to the United States by increasing income requirements from at or above 100 percent of the U.S. poverty level to at or above 125 percent of the U.S. poverty level. In 1998, this was close to \$20,000 for a family of four. PCUN staff estimated that the increased financial requirements for sponsoring relatives eliminated this possibility for about half of their Service Center clients to legalize additional family members. Finally, IIRIRA legislation also imposed a final deadline of January 14, 1998, for undocumented family members of a legal resident to file the initial petition to gain legal residency in the U.S. During 1997, PCUN sponsored three forums about the IIRIRA legislation and worked overtime with families rushing to complete their legalization petitions before the January 1998 deadline.

Under this act, undocumented family members filing for residency in the United States after January 1998 were punished if they tried to file while undocumented and living in the United States. They had to leave in order to file for residency, because they could no longer apply in the U.S. If they did leave, then they could trip a bar of up to ten years before they could apply to change their immigration status—if they had been in the United States illegally for more than a year since April 1997 and there was evidence of that. If they were to be lawful, families had to divide and send undocumented family members secretly back to Mexico to apply from there. If families wanted to remain united, they had to take the risk of remaining undocumented in the U.S.

As he left office in late 2000, President Clinton extended a special "sunset provision" that gave another chance to all of those who missed the January 1998 deadline to apply for legal residency if they already had a family member here. A

¹⁴Those who remained illegally in the United States after April 1997 for 180 days received a three year bar and those who remained for one year received a ten year bar to applying for a temporary visa or permanent residence. The law specifically targeted people who entered the U.S. undocumented or who overstayed their visas.

small window of opportunity was created between the dates of December 21, 2000, and April 30, 2001, under the LIFE (Legal Immigration and Family Equity) Act. This window (which was likely to be extended after the end of April 2001) allowed people who qualified for permanent residency—but were ineligible to adjust their status in the United States because of an immigration status violation—to pay a \$1,000 penalty to continue processing in the United States. The high cost of the “fine,” however, has inhibited some people from applying. According to the National Agricultural Workers Survey of 1997–98, about half of farmworkers earned less than \$7500 per year. Given this level of income for many farmworkers, the \$1000 fine plus legal costs for each person processed may make the opportunity unavailable to a significant number of people.

At the same time that the IIRIRA legislation passed making it more difficult for undocumented workers who remained in the U.S. to petition for residency from within the U.S., the U.S. congress began a new round of discussions about the need for a new guestworker program. Ironically, while a significant undocumented population of farmworkers already existed in Oregon, senators Ron Wyden (Democrat) and Gordon Smith (Republican) were busy promoting farmworker legislation to contract additional Mexican workers. Wyden eventually withdrew his sponsorship of proposed guestworker legislation, but Smith continued to be a sponsor of several proposals. Between 1998 and 2001, the U.S. Congress considered a variety of measures that sought to guarantee growers an ample population of agricultural workers. Most of these proposals have been based on the H-2 program. So far (as of September 2001), none have passed, but some version of a guestworker program is quite likely in the near future.

The H-2 program was founded in 1943 when the U.S. Sugar Corporation received approval to contract Caribbean workers to cut cane. During the Bracero Program of 1942–64, Mexican workers could not be H-2 workers. When the Bracero Program ended in 1964, the H-2 program was expanded under pressure from western growers and their lobbyists. As part of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, the H-2 program became the H-2A program and labor standards for certifying labor shortages were strengthened. Under the H-2A program, employers have to document a shortage of available workers in the U.S. Mexican agricultural workers have become the largest group of H-2A workers since 1993 (Health, Education, and Human Services Division 1997).

Proposals to expand the H-2A program have been initiated by congressional members from western states who argue that growers have reported potential impending labor shortages. A study done by the General Accounting Office in December of 1997, however, pointed out “high unemployment rates in agricultural areas, the persistent heavy unemployment of farmworkers, and declining real farm wages, both in hourly and piece rates, as evidence of a farm labor surplus” (Health, Education, and Human Ser-

vices Division 1997). Grower predictions of worker shortages and lobbying for an expanded guestworker bill also come at a time when organized farm labor has been winning contracts in California, Oregon, and Washington.

In 1999, Senator Gordon Smith from Oregon and his cosponsor Senator Bob Graham from Florida introduced legislation (Senate Bill 1814 and Senate Bill 1815) which tied the possibility of legal permanent residency through amnesty (granting legal residency to those who have been here undocumented—in other words forgiving their undocumented status and not deporting them) to the expansion of the current guest worker H-2A program. While the amnesty provision of this legislation was widely publicized, its true intent was to allow growers and the U.S. government greater control over the farm labor force.

Critics of Senate Bills 1814 and 1815, such as PCUN, pointed out that while the bills superficially appeared to favor the estimated one million undocumented farmworkers who already pick crops in the United States, all would have to continue to work at least six months annually for five to seven years before they could earn the right to apply for legal permanent resident status. In many areas, such as the Willamette Valley, the agricultural season is only three to four months. The farm labor force is also segmented by gender so that women have fewer months of work than men. They work primarily in berry harvests in June and July and sometimes in other crops for a few weeks. Women would have difficulty accumulating the required amount of agricultural work on an annual basis that would make them eligible to apply for residency. This would also be the case for many men as well because of the shortness of the agricultural season. Even if farmworkers did manage to find the requisite amount of agricultural work for five to seven years, they would not have any guarantee that they will receive residency. Their names would have been added to a list of residency applicants who currently face a backlog of up to fifteen years before their cases are even considered.

PCUN and other Latino organizations worked to eliminate the guestworker parts of the bills and build momentum for a general amnesty. Forums and marches pushing for general amnesty were held in the first months of 2000 with PCUN playing a leading role. A large demonstration in Portland in support of amnesty for the undocumented occurred in conjunction with the National Association of Chicano and Chicana Studies in March of 2000. During the 106th Congress (1999–2000), coordinated opposition by hundreds of organizations supportive of farmworkers prevented the passage of Senate bills 1814 and 1815. PCUN was an important part of this victory for farmworkers.

At the end of the 2000 legislative session (November 2000), there were discussions of a potential compromise that involved both farmworker organizations (the United Farm Workers, PCUN and others) and growers (The National Council of Agricultural Employers, the Western Growers Association, and the American Farm Bureau). Proposals involved creating a new legalization program for undocu-

mented farmworkers and revising the H-2A program. The compromise would have offered amnesty (legal residency) for many Mexican workers who are currently living undocumented in the U.S. The compromise was unsuccessful, but the effort indicates the power of coalition building among groups like PCUN to create national pressure to honor farmworker and immigrant rights.

In the 107th Congress (2000–2001), two new guestworker bills have been circulating. One bill would require farmers to demonstrate a labor shortage before they can hire workers and would allow foreign workers who have been employed in agriculture for at least 360 days in the previous six years to qualify for legal residency. A competing legislative proposal would expand the use of foreign guestworkers in a variety of industries, and would not grant workers legal residency.

A clear result of any guestworker program would be to make it more difficult for farmworkers already in the U.S. to unionize and improve their working conditions. A new guestworker program makes it difficult for farmworker advocates like PCUN to fight for improvements in childcare, wages, and housing, as growers are allowed to bypass workers already here in favor of a foreign labor market. Instead, employers could be made to compete in the domestic labor market so that improvements in wages and working conditions can become possible—such is the logic that motivates PCUN's continued push to gain collectively-bargained contracts for farmworkers in Oregon.

The Defeat of Anti-Immigrant Legislation in Oregon (1996–97)

The years 1996 and 1997 marked attempts to pass regressive legislation in Oregon against immigrants and to exclude farmworkers from minimum wage requirements. CAUSA, an Oregon statewide Latino-based coalition, was cofounded by PCUN in 1996 to oppose four anti-immigrant ballot initiatives which were potentially worse than California's Proposition 187.¹⁵ The initiatives required the following: the verification of the legal status of all students by public schools, and the exclusion of those without documentation; the denial of driver's licenses to undocumented people; the denial of public benefits and services to anyone undocumented; and that reports on "suspected undocumented immigrants" be made by all state, local, and governmental agencies. PCUN cofounder Ramón Ramírez was a key player in the founding of CAUSA and in its successful

attempts to prevent the anti-immigrant initiatives from reaching the election ballot: they fell far short of the 97,000 signatures needed to qualify. The links forged through CAUSA and its connections to similar groups in California and elsewhere were key to taking on national 1996 immigration legislation, and to efforts to defeat repeated proposals for a new guestworker program.

Raising Awareness: The Development of PCUN's Educational Classes and the Creation of *Voz Hispana*

The passage of Proposition 187 in California caused PCUN's membership to become concerned with the development of classes and education regarding potential anti-immigrant ballot measures in Oregon. In 1995, members were also demanding English and citizenship classes due to a variety of factors: a worsening economic situation in Mexico; an increased interest in voting and permanent immunity from deportation due to fear about Proposition 187; a slow pace of immigration processing for immediate family members; and the existence of a large pool of immigrants that were citizenship-eligible. In response to these demands, PCUN developed its own curriculum which incorporates everyday topics, while also fostering an understanding of U.S. society and discussion on how it is just or unjust. In addition to the government's standard material, the history presented in the citizenship classes is a "people's" history—including a class analysis and a discussion and analysis of history from the marginalized and multiple perspectives of society that are typically excluded from more mainstream texts. Between 1995 and 2000, PCUN enrolled more than 300 students of all language levels in their English and citizenship classes. They have carried out the classes in partnership with *Mano a Mano*, Programa Hispano (Hand to Hand Hispanic Program) in order to extend the classes—made possible by the financial support of the Emma Lazarus fund—down to Salem, Gresham, and surrounding areas. In effect, these classes are helping to create a new pool of citizen voters who are educated, concerned about political issues that affect them, and motivated to participate in the political system and push for change.

During 1997, local PCUN members, staff, and allied organizations in Woodburn rallied residents to support naming one of two new public schools for César Chávez. While the Woodburn school board refused (instead naming the schools "Heritage" and "Valor"), the refusal prompted local residents to form the citizen's group, *Voz Hispana* (Hispanic Voice). During the summer of 1997, *Voz Hispana* rallied more than eighty Latino residents to attend three consecutive school board meetings. Some of the key participants in these meetings were fifty farmworker families who reside at the *Nuevo Amanecer* housing project built by PCUN's sister

¹⁵Proposition 187 was passed by California voters in 1994, although it was rejected by nearly four out of five Latino voters. If enforced, the law would have denied public education, non-emergency healthcare, and other social services to undocumented immigrants and their children. The law also required public employees to report people they suspected of being in the U.S. without permission to immigration authorities. A federal judge ruled that most portions of Proposition 187 were unconstitutional and they have not been enforced.

organization, Farmworker Housing Development Corporation. In these meetings, Voz Hispana pressured the school board to name the library at Valor Middle School for Chávez, to erect a permanent display about Chávez and his work, to declare his birthday on March 31st as "César Chávez Day" in all Woodburn schools, and to demand that special school-wide and classroom activities be organized in celebration of that day. The Woodburn School Board accepted all of these points. Since that time, special curricula and assemblies have been organized around César Chávez which promote a sense of pride in the farmworker movement, as well as provide a broader range of people with an education about the work and beliefs of this national hero. Voz Hispana continues to take an interest in local politics and has also developed an interest in Latino voting and election participation in Woodburn.

Clergy and Others Join PCUN in Pressuring Growers to Sign Contracts

Pressure on growers to negotiate and sign contracts continued in 1996, with Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) calling on growers to accept collective bargaining. EMO endorsed the NORPAC Boycott in 1996 and overwhelmingly reaffirmed the endorsement in July of 1997, despite a strong agribusiness campaign to persuade EMO to rescind it. Other pressure tactics used on NORPAC included a rally supporting the boycott outside the Northwest Food Processors Association's convention in Portland, a candlelight vigil at the annual Agribusiness Celebration Dinner in Salem, and a farmworker protest at NORPAC's annual meeting.

In 1997, PCUN continued to pressure NORPAC farms, expanding field organizing from seven to fifteen farms. A summer field accompaniment program allowed 300 supporters a first-hand view of the conditions under which farmworkers labor. Two PCUNistas were assaulted by a contractor and six squad cars were called on another occasion to disband a prayer meeting at the Zielinski labor camp. That summer, clergy continued to visit labor camps to conduct prayer meetings and bring farmworker labor and living conditions to the attention of the public. Two clergy who were arrested sued the growers and the Marion County Sheriff, winning a \$44,500 settlement in May 2000.

Workers affiliated with PCUN also felt the pressure that summer, as growers increasingly tried to squeeze out anyone who supported the union. Current field organizer Efrain Peña was pushed out of Coleman Farms in St. Paul, Oregon in 1997. His first contact with PCUN occurred during the summer of 1995 when he participated in a work stoppage as part of the Tenth Anniversary Campaign. He continued his contact with the organization, participating in rallies and working on the weekends in the union office. In 1997, he was finally moved out of his farm job because of his in-

creasingly open affiliation with PCUN. Regarding that time, he states:

At Coleman they knew that I was working with PCUN so they began to pressure me so that I would leave.... They kept giving me fewer and fewer hours. Because in 1994, 1995, and 1996 they gave me a lot of work and good jobs. That doesn't mean that the jobs were well-paying, but they gave me lighter work. I worked with the machinery, like driving a tractor. But after 1997 when I began to really work with PCUN, they began to take all of this away from me. They wouldn't even let me drive a pick-up from the farm, a tractor, not anything. No, I had to go back to the work I did when I first arrived there—all working with my hands even though I had all of this experience.... That is how they punished me...they were watching me because I was always talking with the workers.... They also saw me talking with Leone [a PCUN field organizer].... I used to walk around and see what areas were going to be harvested so that PCUN could understand what was going to happen....

Efrain continued to work with PCUN as a volunteer field organizer and later joined the paid organizing staff.

Oregon farmworkers' rights to minimum wage also suffered another attempted rollback in 1997 when agribusiness, restaurants, and business federations came together to draft HB 2691, which would have exempted significant parts of the labor force from receiving minimum wage. In November of 1996, Oregon voters passed an initiative to raise the hourly minimum to \$5.50 in 1997, \$6.00 in 1998, and \$6.50 in 1999. In addition to other provisions (counting tips as part of the minimum wage, providing a "training" sub-minimum wage for workers under 18, and counting a portion of medical insurance premiums against minimum wage), House Bill 2691 exempted growers from paying the minimum wage in piece-rate systems in which 50 percent of the work crew was making the minimum wage—thus excluding the other part of the crew from earning the minimum. HB 2691 did not reach the House floor and was not enacted due to pressure from PCUN, CAUSA, and other groups that mobilized.



PCUNistas participating in the mobilization against HB2691 in Salem, Oregon.

PCUN's Historic Victory: Oregon's First Farmworker Collective Bargaining Agreement

The final years of the 1990s brought PCUN a historic victory through the signing of Oregon's first farmworker collective bargaining agreement. After more than twenty years of working to create a climate conducive to collective bargaining—work first pioneered by the Willamette Valley Immigration Project, PCUN, and other organizations—farmworkers in Oregon finally went to the negotiating table and emerged victorious. In 1998, PCUN signed four contracts.

The first contract was signed with Nature's Fountain Farms—a farm that produces blueberries, strawberries, and antique roses and which later received organic certification. The agreement authorized Nature's Fountain to place the PCUN union label on its products. This agreement, like the three that followed, provided for more than a dozen rights and protections for farmworkers not afforded by law—including seniority, grievance procedures, overtime, paid breaks, and union recognition. A PCUN editorial published shortly after the signing of the contract read, in part:

César's dream was—and ours is—collective bargaining agreements covering all farmworkers who want a union. We've come this far by applying the lessons which César and the UFW taught us: embracing the "Sí, Se Puede" spirit, insisting on collective bargaining because it's the only lasting solution to exploitation, and working for a decade or two to achieve that fundamental change rather than resigning ourselves to accept expedient, but short-lived and shallow reforms. Continuing on that road means strengthening the NORPAC/Gardenburger Boycott, eliminating union busting (like the Smith H-2C program), and demonstrating that consumers will prefer union label produce (PCUN Update, May 1998).

Scott Frost, co-owner of Nature Fountain Farms, made a historic move by breaking ranks with other growers and signing with PCUN. He stated, "It is my hope that in creating an example, a working model, that Nature's Fountain Farm can be a place where labor and ownership can work together as one, to open a window to change and growth" (Ostrach 1998:2). Later that year, PCUN signed contracts with three other farms, including Thomas Paine Farms in Kings Valley (Oregon's largest grower and packer of chestnuts), Moon Ridge Farms in Beaver Creek, and a fourth small grower. The Moon Ridge Farms agreement included paid medical insurance, 401K retirement, and paid vacation. Such terms are historic for farmworkers.

While the number of workers covered under PCUN's first contracts was small (approximately thirty-six), the dream of collective bargaining finally became a reality in Oregon. The contracts and the protections they provided established a precedent and provided workers with a positive model of new possibilities.

Gardenburger Cuts Ties with NORPAC and Labor Standards Are Introduced for the Country's Largest Organic Processor of Frozen Fruits and Vegetables

The year after PCUN signed its first contracts, they won a significant victory on a related front: in April of 1999, Gardenburger did not renew their contract with NORPAC Food Sales, Inc. Although Gardenburger officials stated that this decision came about independently of the boycott, PCUN organizers had a different perspective. Right before Gardenburger cut ties with NORPAC, twelve colleges and universities had joined the boycott and more than 100 stores in twenty-nine states had discontinued sales or had made pledges not to stock Gardenburger products. The victory came in the midst of an east-coast tour to promote the boycott. The Gardenburger boycott demonstrates how boycotts and collective bargaining drives can work together to secure farmworker rights. The NORPAC boycott continues in 2001, despite the Gardenburger victory.

The Gardenburger boycott and contract-signing victories also encouraged PCUN to pursue worker rights in the organic farming sector, an area consumers often assume to be inherently progressive. However, organic farmers may have to be pushed to respect farmworker rights just like conventional growers. Cascadian Farms is the country's largest processor of frozen organic fruits and vegetables with annual sales of over \$40,000,000 and an 83 percent market share. In April of 1999, Cascadian Farms required all growers who supply them with produce to abide by labor standards in their field operations. The standards include: compliance with all local, state, and federal laws, fair and reasonable treatment, termination only for just cause, breaks, no retaliation for valid complaints, freedom of association off the job, and full landlord/tenant rights in labor camps. The adoption of labor standards by Cascadian Farms also provided further indirect pressure on NORPAC by demonstrating that food processors can set labor standards for the farms that supply them.

Cascadian's decision to develop labor standards arose in part from worker complaints at Hester Farms near Dayton, a major Cascadian supplier and the largest organic farm in Oregon. These complaints focused on substandard housing conditions and minimum wage violations. PCUN organizers began working with the eighty or so Hester workers during the harvest season of 1997. In the winters of 2000 and 2001, PCUN field organizers also went to Mexico to follow through with workers who had left Oregon to return to their home towns in Mexico. They also continued to talk with workers who passed the winter season on the Hester farm.

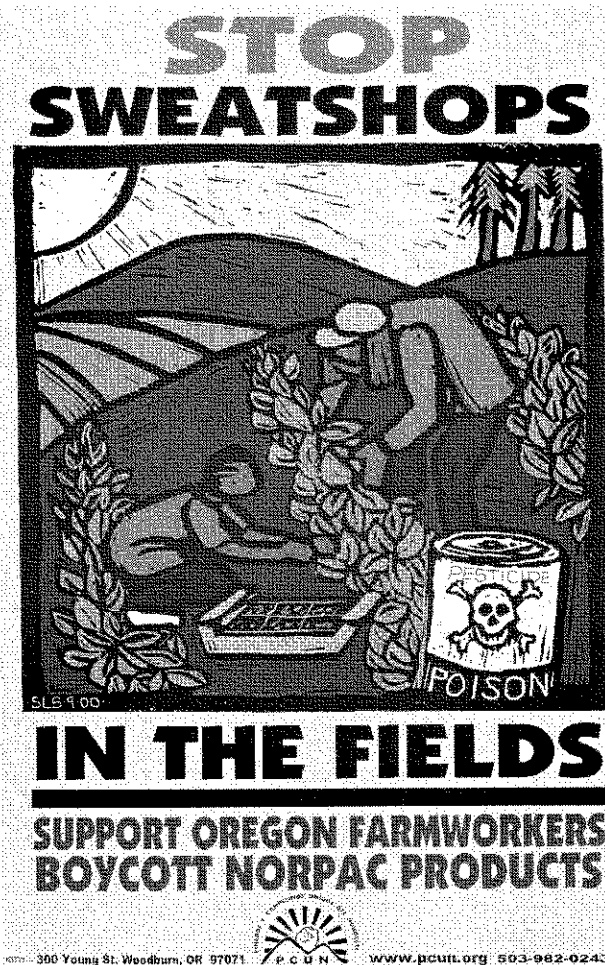
PCUN also continued to pressure Kraemer farms. In June of 1999, the main Kraemer labor camp was inspected

by the Oregon division of OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) and found to have six violations. Besides the six violations in the main Kraemer camp, inspectors cited another twenty-five violations at a second, unregistered camp, eleven at a third camp, and five at a fourth camp. The only fine issued was \$500 for failure to register the fourth camp. Forty-two workers filed suit against Kraemer Farms, seeking tens of thousands of dollars in damages and penalties for multiple violations of worker protection standards. This legal action is ongoing.

National Campus Tours and Collaboration with the Campaign for Labor Rights

During 1999 and 2000, PCUN organizers did extensive campus tours to increase student support for the NORPAC boycott. Farmworkers spoke in Canada (a major importer of NORPAC products) at the University of Guelph, King's

College, Carleton University, York University, Trent University, and the University of Windsor, as well as at many U.S. campuses. Working in conjunction with the Campaign for Labor Rights, PCUN launched an educational and organizing campaign focused on the theme "Sweatshops in the Fields," drawing parallels between the conditions faced by apparel workers in sweatshops with those faced by commercial agricultural workers (specifically NORPAC workers) in the fields: in both environments, workers endure long hours in physically dangerous environments for low pay and are afraid to organize or speak up about substandard conditions for fear of being fired. The tours not only promoted the NORPAC boycott, but also worked to recruit student volunteers for activities such as the Summer 2000 Student Mobilization. During this event, dozens of student activists came to Oregon for a week to accompany organizers to the fields, to visit with workers in labor camps and in their homes, to participate in actions against unjust anti-farmworker legislation, and to discuss boycott strategies with other students. Canadian as well as U.S. students and campuses were part of this effort.



Poster from fall 2000 urging consumers to stop "Sweatshops in the Fields" and support the NORPAC boycott.

Canadian Labour Congress Endorsement of NORPAC Boycott

On May 16, 2000, the Executive Council of the Canadian Labour Congress (representing 2.3 million unionized workers in Canada) voted to endorse the boycott of all NORPAC products in their country (PCUN webpage). Nine Canadian national and local unions are working to remove boycotted products, such as Soup Supreme and FLAV-R-PAC from their institutions. Going outside national U.S. boundaries to involve an international market reflects an important strategic step towards pressuring NORPAC to respect farmworker rights regarding collective bargaining. Transnational organizing is certainly a necessary step for any labor movement in today's globalized economy, or within the context of regionalized economic agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Through this most recent endorsement of the boycott, PCUN has succeeded in adding a new level of pressure to NORPAC, and in demonstrating the power of grassroots transnational cooperation.

Mujeres Luchadoras Progresistas: PCUN Women Launch a Successful Economic and Leadership Project

The women's project of PCUN, now called Mujeres Luchadoras Progresistas, launched a highly successful income-producing project in 1997 which has continued to grow each year: project members designed, assembled, marketed, and sold 125 Christmas wreaths. The Christmas

wreath project was a more successful economic endeavor than previous attempts. In 1995 and 1996, the Women's Project produced crocheted items and piñatas and sold them through a bizarre. Although both of these products sold, they were very labor intensive and the financial returns were low. With the Christmas wreath project, however, the group hit its stride. Project advisor Susan Dobkins recalls of the 1997 season:

The first season the Christmas wreath project was kind of like, we are not sure if we can do it.... The season started off with a little bit of a "no se puede" (it can't be done) attitude. But by the end of the season the excitement had built so much, especially when people came and saw the wreaths and the women saw the reaction of people who were buying the wreaths, that I saw this whole transformation into "si se puede" (yes, it can be done). We can do this. We do have the power to make something people like and it can earn money.... The money is kind of secondary...it is more a sense of self-confidence and confidence in the compañeras.

One participant in the Women's Project, Francisca López,¹⁶ first came to the Service Center at PCUN in 1997 in order to straighten out an auto insurance claim. She joined the women's project and eventually became very involved. She recalled how much the group means to the women who arrive and the kind of family feeling that pervades the meetings. The kind of space created by a group of women provides many who arrive with a special haven for sharing their feelings and working with others to resolve common issues. Having a women-only space also gives women the confidence to speak up. Once they have gained self-confidence within the women's group and are comfortable taking positions and speaking up in public, they can translate these skills to other arenas. Francisca stated:

A lot of women who come to the group have lived in poverty...they have families where the husband works but it isn't enough money to maintain the children and also to pay rent. We also have single mothers who arrive in the group who don't have anyone to help them. They come to the group and we help them. They come here and work and earn a little money.... And when they come here with us they begin to talk. It feels like coming to visit your family. When women come to be with us they feel comfortable and they begin to talk and it really helps. We can help women who want to talk about their problems.... It's different here. Women won't talk about things this way in a group of men. But this is a group of women and they come and talk about their personal lives.... They talk about what they have done, what kind of suffering they are going through and we help each other.

Lucía Zuriaga joined the women's group in 1998. For her it has also been an important space for escaping the isolation of being alone at home with children and provides a chance

to learn new skills and to share life experiences with other women. She also appreciates the extra income.

I realized that this is a place where we can do something for ourselves. There are women who don't have work and here we can get a little bit of work. And a lot of times when we are alone in the house we feel bored and sometimes there are problems there. Since we are here [making wreaths and coming to meetings] we are no longer shut up in the house and here we get together and resolve our problems. Here in the women's group we are doing something for ourselves, for the women.

In addition to producing and selling Christmas wreaths, the women's group provides farmworker women with an opportunity to foster a sense of satisfaction, pride, mutual support and to learn new skills in small enterprises and leadership. The group has a cooperative format—sharing decisions, work, and financial rewards.

In 1998 the group produced and sold 490 wreaths, in 1999 they sold over 900, and in 2000 close to 1,000. More than two dozen women took part in the wreath project. Another key part of this project's success is the sale and promotion network, composed primarily of religious and labor supporters who became active through the NORPAC boycott or the Field Accompaniment Campaign of PCUN.



Sara Luz Cuesta Hernández and her granddaughter assemble wreaths for Mujeres Luchadores Progresistas in 1999.

Pressing for Improved Pesticide Reporting

In 1999, PCUN opposed a bill that was an extremely restricted version of a previous bill on the reporting of pesticide use. With the support of groups like NCAP (Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides), OSPIRG (Oregon State Public Interest Group Citizens Lobby) and the Oregon Environmental Council, the bill passed—although it does nothing to address the pesticide issues faced

¹⁶This is a pseudonym used at the interviewee's request.

by Oregon farmworkers, according to PCUN staff. The contracts PCUN negotiated in 1998 provide one of the best avenues for regulating pesticide use. PCUN has developed "Ten Commitments to Protect Farmworkers from Toxic Pesticides" that focus on the following: prohibiting the use of any pesticide known to cause cancer, birth defects, neurological damage, or that are in the highest acute toxicity category; prohibiting all aerial application of pesticides; guaranteeing that farmworkers know what pesticides are used where and will receive training about their hazards; requiring a use-reporting system for all workers that includes all ingredients (active and inert) in all products; requiring a mandatory national reporting system for all potential pesticide-related incidents and illnesses by agricultural employers and health professionals; guaranteeing all workers the right to collective bargaining; requiring an environmental monitoring system of pesticides in farmworker communities and families, and; requiring and promoting research on pesticides and health issues and the transition from toxic pesticides to biorational and sustainable pest control methods (PCUN webpage).

Part VII

The Struggle Ahead: 2001 and Beyond

AS THE FARMWORKER MOVEMENT in Oregon now approaches a quarter-century of sustained growth and advancement, two challenges loom large in the near future. First, agribusiness has signaled its intention to launch the most direct legislative attack on farmworker rights in thirty years—once again seeking to ban strikes during harvest and secondary boycotts. This development is a clear indicator that PCUN is perceived as a threat by the commercial agriculture industry in Oregon. This “threat” is rooted in the fact that PCUN has succeeded in redefining the debate about agricultural labor from paternalistic proposals that would only ameliorate the worst conditions, to systemic change that would redistribute workplace power—the very heart of unionization. Coming in response to a dozen years of activism, the proposed striking ban is even more transparent and outrageous than it was three decades ago—and will thus prove to be a huge organizing opportunity.

The second challenge is achieving a new legalization and amnesty program for farmworkers. The concerted and thus far successful struggle against a new Bracero Program designed to bring in contracted workers from Mexico as guestworkers has forced agribusiness to accept their only alternative: the legalization of currently undocumented farmworkers already in the U.S. Such a program came close to reality at the end of the year 2000. When legalization comes about, it will serve as yet another catalyst for expanding, solidifying, and deepening PCUN’s farmworker base and thus create the context for dramatic new organizing campaigns.

Conclusions

This history of farmworker organizing in the state of Oregon suggests that the right to collective bargaining is not easily won: more than twenty years of sustained organizing at the state, local, and national level all contributed to the signing of the first collective bargaining agreement in 1998. PCUN succeeded in achieving this historic goal through a combination of the patience and tenacity involved in building a long-term relationship with the farmworker community, constructing viable regional, national, and international coalitions, and combining yearly field organizing efforts with boycotts and the constant watchdogging of state and national legislative processes. A commitment to build leadership within its 4,000 plus membership also resulted in the creation of new leaders who are given more responsibility as they become ready. The growing number of women in the agricultural labor force means that their leadership will be crucial to future PCUN campaigns, a fact that is recognized and actualized through special PCUN projects focusing on women’s concerns and abilities. Another key legacy of PCUN’s efforts is the organization of a well-prepared and committed group of activists who dedicate themselves to work on a long-term basis, thus contributing to the reality of collective bargaining for farmworkers in the state of Oregon. In the future, PCUN will continue the struggle to expand the number of contracts for farmworkers, to defend farmworker rights at the state and national level, and to build even stronger coalitions with labor groups, students, and Latinos, as well as others committed to achieving basic human and labor rights for the Mexican farmworker community in Oregon and elsewhere in the United States.

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Appendix One

Power Relations in Farm Labor

Farmwork takes place in a system of labor relations which also represent a hierarchy of power, authority, and control. These are fundamental class relations, and referred to as relations of production.

Farmworkers: In 1998, there were over 1.5 million seasonal farmworkers in the United States. These workers have over two million dependents, bringing the nation's total population of seasonal farmworkers and their families to 3.5 million. There are 700,000 migrant farm workers who along with their dependents total over one million. In 1998, seasonal farmworkers earned an average of \$6,500 per year. Migrant workers earned an average of \$5,000 per year. Two-thirds of migrant households and 70 percent of migrant children live below the federal poverty line. Thirty percent of seasonal farmworkers are born in the U.S., including Latinos, African Americans, Whites, and Native Americans. The remaining 70 percent are immigrants, most of whom (90 percent) are from Mexico.

In 1997-98, it was estimated that one out of every four farmworkers is undocumented. In the West and Northwest that percentage is probably much higher. In Oregon, some people estimate that 50 to 80 percent of the farm labor force is undocumented, although most workers in Oregon reside in the state year-round. In the 1990s, an increasing percentage of farmworkers brought their families to Oregon to reside permanently. Farmworkers in Oregon work under extremely harsh conditions, for low pay, and have been struggling for decades to gain the right to collective bargaining. While four contracts have been signed in the state by PCUN, the majority of farmworkers are still not unionized.

Farmworker Unions: Organize workers to obtain the right to bargain collectively (as a group) with their employers to ensure basic rights including reasonable working conditions (ability to take breaks, work safely, have good equipment), just compensation for their work (decent wages, overtime), benefits (health insurance, vacation leave, sick leave), freedom from sexual harassment, and provision of child care. Examples include PCUN (Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste), UFW (United Farm Workers) and FLOC (Farm Labor Organizing Committee).

Corporations: The top of the power hierarchy in farming is found in large corporations that buy produce from farmers such as Campbell, Inc. Often farmers have direct contracts with corporations, particularly beginning in the 1970s and later. Targeting corporations which buy grower produce is thus an important part of farmworker union strategizing.

Grower Owned Cooperatives: NORPAC: Over the past several decades, growers have pooled their profits and bought up major processing facilities from multi-national corporations like General Foods. Today, one of these grower-owned cooperatives, "NORPAC Foods, boosts annual sales of approximately \$258 million. It is one

of the West's largest food processing companies and the twelfth largest in the United States. They use their profits to expand into distribution and other segments of the food industry. For example, in Oregon growers use institutions like NORPAC to own canneries as well. They also set the harvesting calendar and affect labor conditions in the field.

Growers: The number of farms has steadily decreased in this century. The largest 1.5 percent of the nation's farms produce 38 percent of the country's agricultural products. Production has increased as farms substitute technology for human labor. During harvest seasons of perishable hand-harvested crops, growers often try to get the most possible out of farmworkers. They can either create incentives (collective bargaining, decent wages, reasonable working conditions) to ensure workers will accept their temporary jobs or they can go for the most desperate workers and keep wages low. In most cases it has been the latter strategy. As federal laws increased to provide some worker rights and required growers to keep accurate records and allowed enforcement agents to investigate farms and living and working conditions, many have become dependent on labor contractors and try to avoid responsibility for many aspects of employing farmworkers. Other laws regulating working conditions are also frequently ignored and poorly enforced.

Contractors: Intermediaries who connect growers looking for workers with workers looking for jobs. They may take on many managerial aspects of work as well—particularly those for which the growers do not want responsibility. The likelihood of abuse increases in direct relation to the amount of control contractors have over a farm laborer's daily existence. Some may pay farm laborers for fewer hours than they work, loan money at high interest rates, and require workers to pay for food, rent, tools, and transportation—often charging exorbitant prices. They may pocket wage deductions that are supposed to go to state and federal governments, such as Social Security. Most contractors are from the same ethnic group as laborers and speak the same language. Many labor contractors are not registered, and although growers are obligated by law to use registered contractors, many do not. In the state of Oregon there are about 10,000 contractors.

Riteros: Usually work with or for the contractors. They provide rides to and from the fields, and can also recruit laborers. Like contractors, many charge fees and even require workers to take rides to fields even if they have or can arrange their own transportation.

Mayordomos: Supervisors who assign workers to rows and walk the rows monitoring the workers. They also discourage contact with union organizers and are usually allied with farm contractors.

Camperos: Individuals in charge of labor camps who are often close relatives of the labor contractors or the farm supervisor. Camp operators are required to register with BOLI (see below).

Coyotes, polleros, pateros: People who smuggle undocumented migrants over the U.S. border for a payment. Some operate between border cities, staying with migrants only until they have crossed the border, while others will transport migrants from their homes in Mexico directly to job sites in California, Oregon, Texas or elsewhere. Some work alone, others are a part of complex networks involving crossing guides, drivers, and houses where workers are hidden until their smuggling fee is paid off. Some coyotes work directly with contractors delivering laborers from within Mexico to work sites in the U.S.

Government Agencies

A variety of government agencies are supposed to regulate the labor conditions for farmworkers, enforce existing legislation, and enforce U.S. immigration policy. They include:

Bureau of Labor and Industry (BOLI): Oregon state agency charged by law with encouraging and enforcing compliance with state laws regulating wages, hours, terms, and conditions of employment, as well as dealing with general issues of employment discrimination. For example, BOLI enforces the minimum wage law since Oregon's minimum wage (\$6.50/hour) is higher than the federal minimum wage (\$5.15/hour). BOLI is specifically responsible for registering and policing farm labor and reforestation contractors and camp operators. BOLI presently has only about three full-time (or equivalent) inspectors covering the entire state, which often results in slow or nonexistent enforcement of laws intended to protect farmworkers.

Department of Labor (DOL): Responsible for enforcement of federal labor and wage laws. Since key federal laws such as the National Labor Relations Act (regulating collective bargaining) exempt farmworkers, DOL's role is limited to enforcing provisions such as child labor, recruitment of seasonal farmworkers, certain wage claims, and standards for vehicles used by contractors to transport workers. Like BOLI, DOL has very few staff dedicated to enforcement and, consequently, compliance with laws intended to protect farmworkers is spotty at best and non-existent at worst.

Oregon Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OR-OSHA): Responsible for enforcement of workplace safety laws, including inspection of labor camps, enforcement of labor camp standards, and enforcement of worker protection standards regarding the use of pesticides. Like BOLI and DOL, OR-OSHA has very limited staff. PCUN has recently documented numerous instances of non-enforcement or flawed methods, such as failing to interview workers when inspecting labor camps, failing to report related conditions (such as drinking water quality) to appropriate public health agencies, and the imposition of only token fines, even for repeat violations.

Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS): Responsible for enforcing the laws regulating the admission of foreign-born persons to the United States and for administering various immigration benefits including work authorization and other permits, residency, immigrant and nonimmigrant sponsorship, naturalization of qualified applicants for U.S. citizenship, refugees, and asylum. Additionally, INS agents patrol U.S. borders and arrest hundreds of thousands of people attempting to enter the country. INS work affecting farmworkers includes: handling applications by U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents for immigrant spouses or children, conducting raids at work places (including fields and farms) to arrest undocumented workers, and enforcing employer sanctions (fining employers for hiring undocumented workers and pressuring them to fire workers whose documents are found to be improper or fraudulent).

Legal and Community Service Organizations

Nonprofit organizations which receive government, corporate, and/or foundation funding to provide services such as health care, job training, emergency food and shelter, information and referral, housing, legal, and education-related services. Among the organizations of this type with which PCUN works most closely are: Oregon Law Center, Oregon Legal Service Farmworker Unit, Farmworker Housing Development Corporation, Mano a Mano, Únete, Programa Hispano, Centro Cultural, and Centro Latinoamericano.