THE FARMWORKERS' JOURNEY

Ann Aurelia López

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LL-SCALE CORN
CUECA, JALISCO
)s)[a]

e[b]

rn per Ton	*Profit or Loss*
3,000	(–100)
4,000	900
5,000	1,900

ıyments[c]

rn per Ton	*Profit or Loss*
3,400	300
4,400	1,300
5,400	2,300

Return[d]

rn per Ton	*Profit or Loss*
5,000	2,900
3,000	4,900
0,000	6,900

corn with a project yield of 3–5 tons is 3,100
wing (hired labor) = 300; misc. hired

rmer adjustment to NAFTA economy; assumes

nd fertilizers have skyrocketed in

w that people can't even break even.
times the prices are so low for the
never makes it to market. Prices
's what they will earn for each har-
ı has a government price, but the
› pesos per ton of corn. But fertilizer
›ses money. Before, the inputs were
· are more expensive and aren't

EMIGRATION PRESSURES

The husbands of poor families in Mexico are often expected to emigrate as a means of providing for children that would otherwise risk death by starvation. Loreta Medina, the niece of Juan Borrego, has six children and lives in the poorer outskirts of Tuxcueca, Jalisco, on Lake Chapala. She and her husband and children live cramped into two small rooms next to the pigs and other livestock of a local storeowner who rents the rooms to them. The outdoor cooking area where she makes tortillas is literally blanketed with flies in the summer.

In 1998 when I spoke with her, Loreta was distressed about the financial circumstances of her family. A drought resulted in a failed corn harvest in her small corn plot, and she harvested only three sacks of corn. She complained about the high cost of chemical inputs. Her husband is a fisherman in the declining fishing industry of Lake Chapala. As a way of augmenting the family income, Loreta washes and irons clothes for people in town while her oldest daughter, Ana, babysits the younger children in the family. Loreta wants to take birth control pills but can't because of a medical condition. She has considered sterilization, but the cost of the surgery is prohibitive.

In conversations with Lucia Margarita, Juan Borrego's sister, she expressed unbridled contempt for Loreta's husband, who, even with hungry children, refused to leave the family to work in the United States. She found his reluctance to leave his family for work in the United States "unforgivable." She questions how he can stay home and watch his children go hungry when he could be supporting them with income earned in the United States.

The Salinas and Watsonville farmworker participants in this study chose emigration out of Mexico to California as the only viable response to the socioeconomic conditions they confronted in Mexico. The decision to emigrate, especially undocumented, is not made lightly, without serious deliberation among family members (Martin and Widgren 1996). Thirty-two central California farmworkers were asked their work location of preference, Mexico or California, assuming that they could earn a living. Of the 32 respondents, 24 (75%) indicated that they would prefer to live in Mexico, seven expressed a preference for working in California (22%), and one was ambivalent (3%). Those who prefer to live in California have lived in the state for many years and moved their family members from Mexico to California to maintain family unity.

pression among would-be emigrants is *"De ser rico en México y pobre en Estados Unidos, mejor pobre"* ("Of the choice between being rich in Mexico or poor in the United States, it's better to be poor in the United States") (Girón 1995, 113).

Other secondary factors contributing to the decision to emigrate include critical opportunities for high-quality education for emigrants' children in the United States, the inability to raise and accumulate capital through any other means, lack of job opportunities in Mexico that pay a living wage, an infrastructure for migration in which migrants learn how to migrate and find jobs and housing in California as a result of concentrating social capital, and the lure of material goods as seen on public television. Over 90 percent of Mexican households now have access to television (Massey et al. 1987, 1998).

Mexico is the largest supplier of immigrants to the United States. Nearly 5.4 million Mexican immigrants entered the United States between 1820 and 1995 (del Pinal and Garcia 1993). By 2003, both men and women from 96 percent of Mexico's 2,350 cities and towns were migrating to the United States (Associated Press 2003), and at least one member of 83 percent of families living in rain-fed subsistence farming areas of Mexico has immigrated to the United States (Girón 1995, 115). The great majority of these immigrants enter the United States illegally (Associated Press 2003).

Undocumented immigration from Mexico to the United States is the largest unlawful migration flow in the world (Rosenblum 2000). Undocumented immigrants attempting to enter the United States in recent years number over a million per year (Annerino 1999; Rosenblum 2000). Near Yuma, Arizona, alone, more than 100,000 immigrants are apprehended trying to cross the border illegally each year (Sterngold 2001).

Mexican immigrants primarily originate in six western Mexican states centered around the city of Guadalajara: Aguascalientes, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, Nayarit, and Zacatecas. Twenty percent of Mexico's population live in these states (Runsten and Zabin 1995). International migration from the Mexican sending states of Jalisco and Michoacán has been taking place for at least one hundred years, and the two states were regions of intense bracero recruitment from 1942 to 1964 (Griffith and Kissam 1995).

West-central Mexico has been the locus of some of the highest outmigration rates to the United States in Mexico (Castro 1986; Chavez 1992; García y Griego 1989). Michoacán, Jalisco, and Guanajuato were

the most important outmigration states in Mexico from 1990 to 1995 (Mummert 2003). Indeed, almost the entire population of the state of Michoacán is in motion, with most of the forty-one *municipios* classified as regions of high levels of outmigration (XII Censo General de Población y Vivienda 2000, as cited in Mummert 2003). This state accounted for 49.7 percent of migratory flows from Mexico, and 40 percent of the homes in Michoacán had at least one person emigrating to the United States, from 1990 to 1995 (Ramírez 2003). Overall, 40 percent of the more than 100 million people still living in Mexico said they would come to the United States if they had the opportunity (Faux 2006).

Fifty percent of emigrants leaving Mexico for the United States are destined for California, claiming that they prefer to work in California than in any other state. Most of these emigrants were born in west-central Mexico (Consejo Nacional de Población 2004). California in turn absorbs most of the total flow of both legal and illegal immigrants from Mexico (Bustamante 1989). Of the estimated 11 to 12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States (Bybee and Winter 2006; Fox 2002; Garcia 2004; International Labor Conference 2004; Natoli et al. 2001; Ohlemacher 2006; Ruiz 2006), 40–60 percent live in California (Cornelius 1989; del Pinal and Singer 1997; Himelstein and Lascuraín 1993).

Prior to immigration reform in 1965 and 1986, primarily solitary men migrated from west-central Mexico to the United States for seasonal work. They left behind their intact families, villages, and towns and planned to return to them after the harvest season. However, in the past twenty years whole families and even single women are immigrating to and settling in California. About 80 percent of emigrants leaving Mexico for the United States become settlers there; only about 20 percent return to their villages and towns of origin in Mexico. From 1990 to 1995, only 21.5 percent of migrants returned to Mexico; in the six years after NAFTA's initiation and the onset of increased border vigilance, the percentage of migrants returning to Mexico dropped to 17.4 percent (Ramírez 2003).

This recent trend is responsible for the social transformation and restructuring of the rural environment both in Mexico and in California. In California, evidence of settlement including home purchases and U.S. educations has occurred concurrently with the reintensification of California agriculture and the lengthening of the work season (Palerm 2000), NAFTA, increased border enforcement, and increased the cost of *coyotes,* which financially prohibits migrants' return to Mexico.

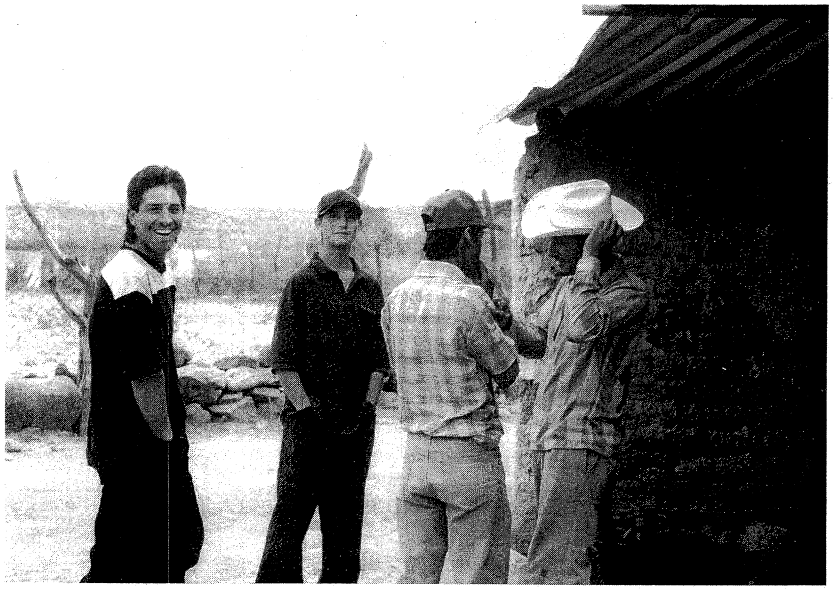

Figure 9. Four of Rosario Morales's sons prior to undocumented emigration to the United States, Los Sauces de Pérez.

Ismena Rocha stated in an interview, "Working here [in California] is a distraction from the sadness I feel for not being with my family in Mexico." Her comment is representative of the reservations expressed by many farmworkers who have left their families and culture behind in Mexico.

Ultimately a combination of complex, powerful structural pressures pushes Mexicans to migrate to the United States. However, I agree with scholars who maintain that the most important factor leading to the decision to emigrate from the west-central Mexico countryside in the post-NAFTA economy, overshadowing all others, is survival (Cornelius and Martin 1993, 6; Girón 1995, 3; Hobbs 2001; Smith and Ellingwood 2001). There is a direct correlation between the price of corn and beans paid to subsistence and small producer farmers in Mexico and undocumented immigration to the United States (White et al. 2003).

The post-NAFTA context of food scarcity and illness is pervasive throughout the rural west-central Mexico countryside, a paradigm in which life is lived and endured at the edge of survival. Hunger is a norm. However, hunger in Mexico isn't caused by the inability of Mexican farmers to produce enough food. On the contrary, in spite of nearly continuous damaging criticism of subsistence and small producer farmers by agribusiness and government in recent years, Mexican subsistence and small producer farmers harvested a record 18 million tons of corn in 1996, according to the Mexican secretary of agriculture (Suppan and Lehman 1997).

The post-NAFTA economy and abrupt government withdrawal of price supports for corn have intensified hunger and malnutrition in the rural countryside. Conversations among campesinos and family members about *aguantando hambre* (enduring hunger) are commonplace. The expression is as common in west-central Mexico as "having a headache" is in the United States. People live in a daily contextual reality of undernutrition. Sunken cheeks and thin bodies or overfed malnourished bodies are the norm. Almost every family can relate a story about a village or town resident who died of starvation, most often a child.

Frequent stomachaches and diarrhea are common. These widespread afflictions are exacerbated by inadequate rural sanitation and a lack of adequate nutrition. Some rural peasants cultivate home gardens full of plants that are deemed herbal remedies for these conditions. For example, in the home garden of Rogelio Durán of Charo, Michoacán, approximately half of all plants are cultivated for the purpose of alleviating stomachaches and diarrhea. West-central Mexican subsistence farmers and their families are desperate and hungry. They emigrate because, if they don't, they may not survive.

Directly related to the issue of survival is the wage differential between the United States and Mexico. Immigration expert Wayne Cornelius maintains that the "U.S./Mexico wage differentials are a more powerful determinant of migration decisions in rural Mexico than outright joblessness" (Cornelius and Martin 1993, 17). A male worker in the food processing industry in Mexico receives about $5 a day for very hard work. This wage rate is about two-thirds what is necessary to support a family (Zavella 2000). Wage differences have continued to differ by factors of eight and fifteen times, and standard-of-living differences are similar (Johnston 2001; Huffman 1995).

In west-central Mexico, wage laborers on farms earn between 16 and 80 pesos per day. This is comparable to approximately $1.60–$8.00 per day. Laborers in California agribusiness can expect to be hired for more than an equivalent rate per hour. This differential is unlikely to change in the near future because of the present huge labor surplus on the Mexican side of the border (Cornelius and Martin 1993). A common ex-

Although factors such as the productivity crisis in Mexican rain-fed agriculture have contributed to family immigration to California, NAFTA exacerbated the social and economic conditions leading to it. At the same time, expansion of migration networks better facilitated the process. Today, less than 10 percent of farmwork in California is done by those considered to be seasonal workers returning to Mexico after the harvest (Palerm 2000; Villarejo and Runsten 1993).

DOCUMENTED/UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRATION SUMMARY

Although I never directly asked farmworker interviewees about their immigration status, many Mexican farmers and California farmworkers, in the process of discussing employment and family issues, divulged harrowing tales of border crossings. Farmers, family members, and cab drivers in Mexico were particularly munificent with immigration information. Farmworkers in California, on the other hand, were much more reticent to disclose such information about themselves and family members.

In Mexico, fourteen families and four cab drivers provided vivid accounts of their own and family member experiences. Of the 76 individuals acknowledged as undocumented entrants to the United States, only three immigrated without hiring a *coyote* to assist the crossing. Thirty-three farmers and family members spoke openly about hiring *coyotes*. The mechanism for undocumented entry was not mentioned by 25 individuals. Thus 33–76 individuals associated with the eighteen individuals and families with whom immigration was discussed acknowledged hiring *coyotes*. Only 21 of 100 individuals from Mexico emigrated with documents. Of the 76 individuals in Mexico who acknowledged illegal entry, only 17 ultimately returned to Mexico, resulting in a net flow of 59 individuals from only eighteen random families throughout the region.

These figures support the contention of researchers who have studied the 2000 census. Many assert that the number of undocumented residents is actually much higher than the official estimate of 3 million. As discussed previously, it is now estimated to be over 11 million (Cohn 2001). My total survey, from both Mexico farm family members and interviewees in California who were willing to discuss immigration, records 83 individuals of 113 entering the United States illegally. Only 23 individuals entered with documents. Most of these individuals entered the United States prior to the mid-1980s. In one study of immigration from Gómez Farías, Michoacán, nearly 80 percent of immigrants were destined for Watsonville, California (Castro 1986).

IMMIGRATION REFORM

Migration is possibly the most important international economic phenomenon that is *not* coordinated by an international organization (Rosenblum 2000; Weiner 1993). Immigration policies have remained largely country specific, because NAFTA neglected any provisions for the movement of workers across national borders (Rosenblum 2000). Furthermore, the United States is unwilling to recognize officially that trade-generating mechanisms like NAFTA that ignore a common labor market stimulate undocumented immigration (Muller 1997). Indeed, one of the NAFTA supporters' selling points for the trade agreement was its allegation that, in fact, NAFTA would drastically *reduce* undocumented immigration to the United States by equalizing wages between the two countries and improving the diet in Mexico.

In addition, U.S. residents have always been highly ambivalent about immigration (Chavez 1997; Najar 1999). There is widespread recognition and acceptance of the historical role immigrants from all over the world played in the development of the United States as a First World power. Cultural diversity in this context is viewed positively, as responsible for the country's success as a world leader. But countering this perception is the concept of protectionism and the desire to limit labor market competition and resist the absorption of newcomers. Immigration policy emerging out of this concern is often motivated by nativist politics fueled by xenophobia and racism (Najar 1999). Racism has played a fundamental and continuing role in the development of U.S. immigration policy (Calavita 1989; Healey 1997; Rosenblum 2000). The passage of California's Proposition 187 in 1994, as well as an English-only proposition and the introduction of the California Civil Rights Initiative, introduced a new wave of nativism that ultimately flared into a national "nativist revolt" against undocumented and documented immigrants (Chavez 1997; Golash-Boza and Parker 2006; Ivins 2006; Perea 1997; Santos 2006a, b; Zavella 1997).

In a 2006 *USA Today*/Gallup Poll, nearly 80 percent of those polled indicated that controlling U.S. borders to halt illegal immigrants was extremely or very important; more than 60 percent said that the United States should make illegal immigration a crime (Mangaliman 2006).

SIX

CALIFORNIA'S CORPORATE AGRIBUSINESS

En California la gente vive para trabajar; aquí en México, trabajamos para vivir.

In California people live to work; here in Mexico we work to live.

—José Martínez Espino, mango farmer and Director of Rural Development, Municipal Government, Coacoyul/Zihuatanejo, Guerrero

Porque aquí está un poquito más esclavizado que en México . . . tiene uno que apegarse a sus leyes . . . leyes . . . reglas de . . . de la compañia.

Because here [in California, workers] are a bit more enslaved than they are in Mexico; one is obliged to adhere to the company rules.

—Lorenzo Vasquez, cauliflower picker, Salinas, California

Farmers and their family members who arrive from Mexico to work in the California central coast's corporate agribusiness as farm laborers become part of a farming system that is historically, politically, economically, and ethnically unique. The federal and state legislation governing the lives of farmworkers is often dualistic and arbitrary in both content and enforcement. One example is the manner in which border policy is enacted and enforced. When the need for undocumented labor in the fields of California's corporate agribusiness is high, border enforcement

declines, regardless of the legislative mandates in effect at the time. Similarly, when the need for undocumented labor is low, border enforcement is increased (Hanson and Splimbergo 1999). Although the INS is responsible for enforcing immigration laws, in practice the Border Patrol has never had the budget, staffing, or apparent inclination to enforce the law at the California–Mexico border, largely because of pressures from agriculture (Wells 1996, 66).

GENERATION OF WEALTH AND PROSPERITY

California's corporate agribusiness is unique as the leader and pinnacle of modern capitalist agricultural development in the world today (Palerm 2000; Wells 1996). Wealth and prosperity abound (Taylor et al. 1997; Palerm 2000). California is the nation's most important food producer, generating more than half the nation's fruits, nuts, and vegetables and $27–$30 billion per year (Fernandes 2005; Martin 1989; Villarejo and Schenker 2005). The remarkable productivity of the land in combination with a mild climate results in greater output per acre in crop value than elsewhere in the nation.

From 1998 to 2000, the total value of principal commercial vegetable crops, both fresh market and for processing, increased by nearly $1 billion from about $4.7 billion in 1998 to more than $5.6 billion in 2000 (USDA 2001). By 2003, the total value had increased to almost $5.9 billion (USDA 2004). In contrast, yearly production value in Arizona and Texas is only a fraction of California's yearly production value, and vegetable crop values there actually declined in the 1998–2000 period and the 2001–3 period.

As the nation's leading agricultural producer in 2002 (*California Statistical Abstract* 2003), a growth industry, and a world leader of capital-intensive agricultural enterprises, California agribusiness is envied and emulated worldwide (Martin et al. 1995a; Palerm 2000). As a growth industry, California's agriculture was one of the few healthy sectors of the state's economy during a recent recession (Palerm 2000; Wells 1996). In the U.S. farm crisis year of 1986, California's fruit and vegetable crops increased in value by 12.3 percent (Wells 1996). A comparison of the three-year average crop production for 1970–72 with the three-year average crop production for 1990–92 shows a 98 percent increase (Villarejo and Runsten 1993).

Today California producers are enjoying the benefits of the globalized economy by marketing their products overseas. U.S. agricultural exports

topped $53 billion in 2002, up from $11 billion ten years earlier. U.S. agricultural imports in the same year totaled $41 billion, for a trade surplus of 12 percent (USDA 2003). California agricultural exports in 1995 totaled $11.7 billion (Carter 1997). Almonds are California's largest agricultural export commodity, recording $662.4 million in export sales in 2000 and accounting for 71 percent of all California almond sales (Scripps-McClatchy Western Service 2001). A year later export almond sales reached $685.5 million (*California Statistical Abstract* 2003). Cotton ranked second, with exports worth $616.2 million, a gain in export value of 39 percent over 1999. Seventy-eight percent of California's cotton crop is exported (Scripps-McClatchy Western Service 2001).

In 1994, Fresno, Tulare, Kern, and Monterey counties combined led all other U.S. counties in the value of their crops, accounting for more that $6 billion, or approximately one-third of the year's California total (USDA 1995). Eight years later the crop values for these same four top agricultural counties had doubled to over $12 billion (*California Statistical Abstract* 2003). The central coast of California alone supports a nearly $8 billion agricultural industry that includes more than two hundred crops and employs more than 60,000 people (AWQA 2005; Diringer and Gilman 2006).

Monterey County

Salinas is located in the Salinas Valley of Monterey County. It is one of the richest farming regions in the world (FitzSimmons 1986) and is referred to as the nation's "salad bowl." Monterey County's 2003 agricultural commissioner's report boasts a page of "million dollar crops" (Lauritzen 2003, 19), including leaf lettuce valued at $552 million; head lettuce valued at $489 million; broccoli valued at $280 million; and strawberries valued at $253 million.

In 2000, the gross production value for head and leaf lettuce in Monterey County alone was $775 million, an increase of nearly $200 million over the preceding year (Lauritzen 2000). By 2003, the gross production value for head and leaf lettuce had increased to over $1 billion (Lauritzen 2003), an increase of more than $250 million from 2000. The county's gross value of agricultural production in general steadily increased from $1.93 billion in 1994 (Palerm 2000) to $2.37 billion in 1999 to $2.92 billion in 2000 (California Agricultural Statistics Service 2001, 1). By 2003, the gross value of agricultural production had increased to $3.29 billion, an increase of 10 percent over 2000.

Monterey County producers are becoming even more affluent by exporting produce. In 2003, 520 million pounds of produce was exported. The top produce export commodities were lettuce, broccoli, celery, strawberries, cauliflower, carrots, green onions, asparagus, and tomatoes. In addition, county producers exported almost 17 million pounds of nursery stock, 3 million pounds of seeds, and over 200,000 pounds of cut flowers (Lauritzen 2003, 17).

Santa Cruz County

Watsonville is located in Santa Cruz County, and strawberries are the county's most lucrative crop, with per-acre net returns surpassing those of almost every other crop in the state (Wells 1996). In 1999 the gross farm income from strawberries for Santa Cruz County alone was more than $109 million, while strawberry acreage increased from 2,716 in 1998 to 3, 458. By 2003 the value of Santa Cruz County's strawberry crop had increased to more than $121 million. Even though total acreage planted in strawberries declined slightly, from 3,586 acres countywide in 2002 to 3,201 acres in 2003, production in tons per acre actually increased, from 25.6 in 2002 to 26.81 in 2003 (Moeller 1999, 2003).

Total berry production in Santa Cruz County, including strawberries, red raspberries, and bush berries, yielded a gross farm income of over $133 million in 1999 and increased by over $100 million to almost $239 million within the next four years (Moeller 1999, 2003). Santa Cruz County agricultural commodities sold for $289 million in 1997, representing a 13.2 percent increase over 1996 (California Agricultural Statistics Service 1997). By 2003 the total gross production value of Santa Cruz County agricultural commodities had grown to more than $371 million (Moeller 2003).

Strawberries

California is the U.S. leader in strawberry production, accounting for 82 percent of the nation's strawberry crop. With growers investing $30,000 in each acre (Hamilton 2004), strawberries are farmed so efficiently and intensively that each acre produces an average of 21 tons annually. The central coast is one of two regions in California where most of the strawberry crop, both conventional and organic, is harvested (Ohmart 2003).

Statewide, the 1995 gross farm income from strawberries was $552 million (Johnston 1997). By 2003 the total value of California's straw-

berry crop had increased to almost $778 million (California Agricultural Statistics Service 2003), with 32,636 acres planted in strawberries in the state (California Strawberry Commission 2005). In 2003, over 16 million trays of fresh strawberries and 22.9 million pounds of frozen strawberries were exported. Fresh strawberry exports surpassed those of 2002 by 26.9 percent (California Strawberry Commission 2004).

Together, Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties constitute the largest single strawberry-producing region in California (Wells 1996). With 10,759 acres devoted to strawberry production in 2001 (California Strawberry Commission 2001) and 12,250 planted in strawberries in 2005, the region boasts 37.5 percent of the state's strawberry acreage (California Strawberry Commission 2005). Four-fifths of the U.S. strawberry crop originates from agribusinesses in the Watsonville area, and 20,000 workers are employed there in the strawberry industry alone (Maestas-Flores 1997).

U.S. fresh produce buyers prefer lucrative California strawberries because they have the highest quality and longest shelf life (Wells 1996). Strawberries and cherry tomatoes are California's most capital- and labor-intensive crops (Palerm 1991). Approximately 50 percent of the $25,000–$30,000 invested by a grower in each acre for strawberry production is expended on the labor necessary to grow and harvest this valuable specialty crop (Wells 1996).

Particularly in the Pajaro Valley, growers have the highest nonlabor investments in their crops per acre (Wells 1996). Eduardo Sousa claims that in 2000, Coastal Berry's 800-acre company invested $1,100 per acre to fumigate with methyl bromide, and approximately $25,000 was spent per acre for labor and other expenses. He indicated that to become a strawberry grower on a small farm of 3–5 acres would require an initial investment of at least $25,000. Because of their high investment, growers are keenly interested in developing labor crews with a strong commitment to quality labor. They are especially interested in worker satisfaction and invest in the stability, care, and commitment of labor (Wells 1996).

LAND PRODUCTION AND CONSOLIDATION

California agriculture is different from agriculture elsewhere in the nation in several ways: land consolidation has resulted in land tenure dominated by large holdings which, overall, are larger than farms elsewhere in the nation; the productivity of the land in combination with climate

results in greater output per acre in crop value than in other regions; and California farms are completely dependent upon hired labor, rather than on family labor, for most of the work in the fields.

In combination, these three characteristics result in an agricultural system that can best be described as "industrial," with "farms" that have the characteristics of factories: "factories in the field" (McWilliams 1939). Agricultural industrialization includes "increased labor productivity, purchased farm inputs and machines, crop specialization, land reorganization, huge irrigation works, international markets, complex output processing, and the appearance of large corporations" (FitzSimmons 1986). This agribusiness system, which can be traced historically to the original Spanish land grant system that preceded California statehood, is unique in all the world (Runsten 1981).

California's agriculture has been characterized historically by a trend toward land and production consolidation. Over time, huge tracts of land became concentrated into the hands of a few wealthy landowners (FitzSimmons 1986). This trend can be seen in three separate stages in the history of California land acquisition and distribution (McWilliams 1939).

Centralization of land ownership can be traced to Mexican land grants originally issued to Mexicans under Spanish rule, prior to 1844 when California was a province of Mexico. The Mexican War of 1846–48 and ensuing Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo brought U.S. statehood to California. At this time, the Spanish land grants were transferred directly to individuals through various unscrupulous political and legal machinations. In addition, the federal government gave huge tracts of land to railroad companies for the development of a transportation system. Southern Pacific Railroad was a key beneficiary.

Inaccurate land speculation also contributed to California agricultural land centralization. The federal government gave large areas of "wastelands" to the state government. Speculators were subsequently allowed to place a monetary value on the land. In so doing they purposely devalued the land. The "wasteland" was then sold for ridiculously low prices, sometimes as little as $0.25 per acre. Greedy speculators could then buy up large tracts of land easily (McWilliams 1939).

By the 1930s, fourteen men and a few railroads owned most of the land in California. These land monopolies were the most important contributing factors to the industrialization and development of capitalist agribusiness in California (McWilliams 1939). Initially, the cattle ranching activities of the Mexican period were replaced by extensive wheat

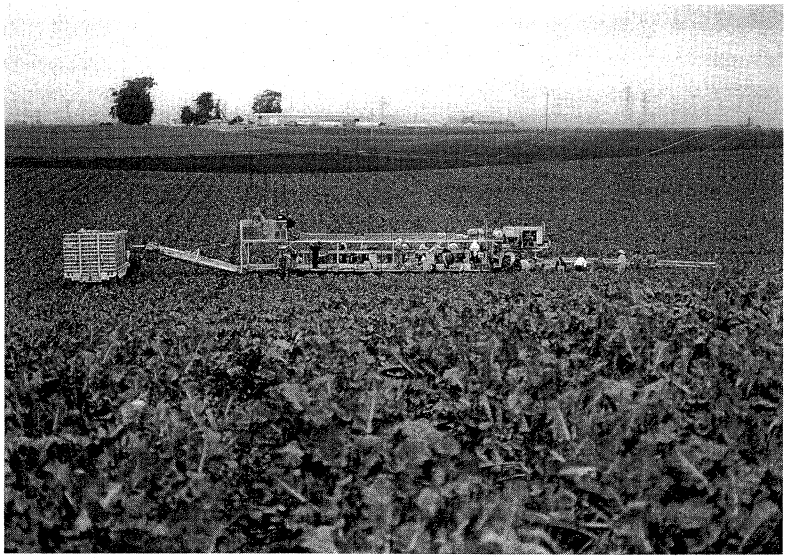

Figure 10. Industrialized agricultural "factories in the field": broccoli harvest with mechanized processing and packing, off Boronda Road, Salinas, California.

farming throughout the state. Wheat grown in California was exported to a lucrative European market. Sugar beets succeeded wheat in the late 1800s. In the early 1900s, with the completion of the railroads connecting California and the East Coast, farmers began to diversify their crops. Field crops such as sugar beets and barley were gradually replaced by a growing fresh vegetable industry (Palerm 2000).

The shift to labor-intensive specialty crops, including strawberries, fresh vegetables, wine grapes, and nursery crops, occurred after World War II as a result of the development of transportation, storage methods, and new markets (Wells 1996). By 1978, for example, specialty crops occupied 85 percent of the harvested land in the Salinas Valley (FitzSimmons 1986). From 1960 to 1989, fruit and vegetable crop acreage increased by nearly 200 percent throughout the state, while field crop acreage decreased by more than 60 percent (Palerm 1991). Between 1980 and 1994, the share of the state's farm value attributable to field crops decreased dramatically while fruit and vegetable production increased dramatically (Palerm 2000).

In Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties, labor-intensive, high-

value crops such as snow peas, baby vegetables, vine tomatoes, tomatillos, and grapes replaced grain and livestock (Palerm 1994). Specialty crops have now completely displaced grains and dry beans in the central coast area (Wells 1996).

The amount of land farmed in California has remained relatively stable, at about 37 percent, or 36,600,000 acres, since 1945. However, the trend has been toward a dramatic decrease in the overall number of farms with the consolidation of farmland into fewer, ever-larger farms. In 1945 there were 138,917 California farms. By 1972 the number had fallen to 57,000, with 12.2 percent of all farms in ownership of almost 32 million acres (Thomas and Friedland 1982).

Prior to 1960, nearly four thousand farms produced tomatoes for processing. By 1972, with the introduction of the tomato harvester, the number had declined to less than seven hundred (Friedland et al. 1975). In 1940 the three largest lettuce growers accounted for less than 20 percent of all lettuce production in California and Arizona. By 1978, four of the largest grower-shippers were responsible for shipping about 40 percent of California/Arizona lettuce (Friedland and Thomas 1978).

In the 1990s, increased crop yields and values occurred at a time when total farm acreage and cost of farm wages declined (Villarejo and Runsten 1993). In the late 1990s and the new millennium, production has become more intensive, creating more value, more jobs, and more income for the state (Palerm 2000). Currently the largest 2.5 percent of California farms operate 60 percent of the state's cropland, and net farm incomes are 2.5 times the national average (Wells 1996, 22).

In 1996 in Santa Cruz County alone, of 58 vegetable farms, seven farms of more than 500 acres accounted for 78 percent of vegetable acreage. Of 149 tree and vine farms, ten farms of 100 acres or more accounted for 42 percent of all tree and vine crops. Of 127 berry farms, twenty-two farms greater than 100 acres accounted for 58 percent of berry farm acreage (Runsten 1998).

The "reintensification" (Palerm 2000; Wells 1996; Zavella 2000) of agriculture that began in the late 1970s and 1980s has been accompanied by an expanded growing season. The high employment season, which formerly extended from May to September, is gradually becoming protracted. The protracted growing season, in turn, requires an ever-greater labor force to grow and harvest the specialty crops effectively. California agriculture has thus become more dependent on migrant labor over the past few decades. Farm labor requirements for crops such as al-

monds, lettuce, strawberries, broccoli, and cauliflower doubled from 1970 to 1989 (Palerm 1991).

ETHNIC SUCCESSION AND DEPENDENCE UPON A HIRED LABOR FORCE

In California's corporate agribusiness, control over labor costs is often the single most important determinant of profitability (Wells 1996). In order for growers to accumulate capital as a result of crop sales, they need to control the price and performance of manual labor. Labor costs in fruit and vegetable agriculture are typically 20–40 percent of the total cost of crop production (Martin 1989). As indicated earlier, the cost of manual labor in strawberries is even higher, at approximately 50 percent of the total per acre expenditure. Indeed, harvest labor costs in this crop have increased steadily over the years (Wells 1996, 49). Growers have limited control over the market value of their crops, and they cannot reduce the costs of inputs. Thus, the costs of labor as well as labor quality are critical as more flexible components of the production process over which the grower has some control.

Wealth generation in California's corporate agribusiness is, in turn, uniquely dependent upon the labor of a tractable, low-paid labor force, characteristically "invisible" and detached from mainstream California society. The invisibility and disconnection can be accounted for by ethnic and linguistic dissimilarities as well as by the often-isolated geographic location of farm labor housing.

Historically, whenever an ethnic group associated with farm labor became too militant for growers to control, threatened growers typically organized and employed a variety of tactics, including violence and murder, to suppress potential strikers. With local, state, and federal law enforcement acquiescing to or supporting them, growers have been instrumental in reinstating the tractable labor force status quo by either forcing compliance by the existing ethnic group or ousting the perceived militant ethnic group and recruiting an entirely new foreign immigrant labor force. Two illustrations of the development of worker militancy and the resultant grower-instigated repercussions are the sugar beet strike of 1903 (Almaguer 1994) and the cotton workers' strike of 1939 (Ruiz 1987).

In addition to grower-initiated suppression of militant farmworkers and unionization, strict statewide legislation is often enacted which compounds the growers' and mainstream society's attempts to restore the group to the former, more familiar status of compliance and invisibility.

In a familiar cycle sometimes referred to as "ethnic succession" (Zabin et al. 1993), ethnic recruitment is followed by eventual ethnic militancy and visibility, punitive grower-instigated retaliation, enactment of discriminatory legislation, the return of that group to invisibility, and recruitment of a new ethnic minority to work in the fields. Such a sequence has occurred repeatedly in California (Friedland and Barton 1975).

In the late 1800s, beginning with the Chinese who worked in the fields after the completion of the transcontinental railroad, a succession of ethnically diverse farm laborers have been recruited to cultivate and harvest crops. In 1882, as a result of the increasing visibility of Chinese workers and their success in purchasing farmlands, the first Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in 1882, effectively excluding Chinese from land ownership in California. The Geary Act of 1892 continued the provisions of the 1882 Exclusion Act and provided for the deportation of all illegal Chinese (McWilliams 1939).

While Chinese were being legislatively discriminated against by the state, growers began to quietly recruit Japanese as the next ethnic group destined for the difficult hand labor required for beet cultivation. Japanese were purported to have the characteristics deemed valuable by the growers—docile, uncomplaining and obviously foreign in a land of predominantly Anglo men and women (Kushner 1975).

Largely in response to Japanese ingenuity, competition, and success at leasing and purchasing California agricultural land, the grower-supported Alien Lands Acts were passed in California in 1913 and 1920. This legislation prohibited foreign-born Japanese from leasing or owning land in the United States. After the enactment of this legislation, most Japanese workers became sharecroppers in California's central coastal farmlands (Wells 1996). The federal Immigration Law of 1924 further restricted Japanese immigration to the United States, and Japanese internment in concentration camps in 1942 effectively removed them as laborers and competitors from all sectors of California society.

Hindu workers appeared in California's agricultural fields for a few years between 1907 and 1910. Hindus in the Imperial Valley harvested the first cotton harvest of any commercial value. Subsequently, Hindus quickly moved into farm ownership. After their success in farm acquisition, the Immigration Act of 1917 was enacted to exclude further Hindu immigration.

Growers recruited Mexican workers as many fled Mexico in the wake of the revolution of 1910. By the time the Dust Bowl "Okies" and "Arkies" succeeded Japanese and Hindu workers in the 1930s, approx-

imately 75,000 Mexicans were working as farm laborers (McWilliams 1939).

John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* poignantly elucidates the plight of the Dust Bowlers and California's agricultural fields as sites of illness, impoverishment, servitude, and other forms of oppression. During the Depression years, with the migration of the Okies and Arkies in the 1930s, over 50,000 Mexican workers, many of whom had acquired U.S. citizenship, were deported (Kushner 1975). Older Mexican Americans in the United States today continue to harbor the scars and sense of betrayal elicited by their own deportation experiences (Olivo 2001).

Growers, however, continued to look to Mexico for a supply of cheap labor that was efficient and docile. Mexican laborers in the early 1900s were believed to be the perfect solution since they either would return to Mexico after the harvest or could easily be deported (Kushner 1975). For the past sixty years, California growers have depended primarily on Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans to work in the fields (Palerm 2000).

Along with Mexicans, a large number of Filipinos have historically been hired as farm laborers. Many Americans viewed the influx of Filipinos into the fields with alarm, as the third successive "invasion" of Asians into the domestic labor force. Growers, by contrast, often viewed Filipinos as more desirable than Mexicans, since they were perceived to be even more docile, low-paid, and hard working (Kushner 1975). Filipinos have, however, been some of the most active organizers in the field (see below).

There is a hierarchy of farmworkers and their experiences. The conditions of corporate agribusiness employment in California are largely dependent upon the stratum on which new recruits find themselves on the farmworker hierarchy. New migrants often replace settled farmworkers who work directly for unions, growers, or growers associations (Lloyd et al. 1988; Mines and Anzaldua 1982).

Currently, the California farm labor market is undergoing a new cycle of ethnic replacement. California growers and farm labor contractors now have access to Mixtec workers from Oaxaca, who are at the bottom of the ethnically stratified farm labor force. The sharply rising flow of indigenous migrants from southern Mexico is the most significant development within the California farm labor market in recent years (Villarejo and Schenker 2005). Their vulnerable situation forces the migrants to accept lower wages and poorer working conditions than *mestizo* (of Spanish and American Indian descent) Mexicans who are at higher levels on the hierarchy and still make up the majority of the California farm labor force (Zabin et al. 1993). To date, Mixtec workers are beginning to appear in significant numbers in central coast agriculture. The number of farmworkers of indigenous origin is growing rapidly and is often considered the fastest-growing segment of California's farmworker population (Aguirre International 2005).

Historically, employer recruitment of successive, ethnically differentiated, foreign-born workforces has been the most important factor in wage depression and the maintenance of agricultural wages at a level that is substantially below that of manufacturing jobs (Zabin et al. 1993). Each successive wave of migrants unintentionally fosters wage depression by their willingness to work for lower wages than their predecessors (Palerm 1991, 1993).

Though California's agriculture has undergone major changes in recent years with its reintensification, transition to fewer and larger farms, mechanization, and greater production of fruit and vegetables resulting from greater consumer demand, hired farmworker employment has not changed (Martin 1989; Palerm 2000). Communities of stable, settled farmworkers who were able to break through recurrent cycles of poverty have never developed in the state (Zabin et al. 1993).

AGRICULTURAL EXCEPTIONALISM

Just as U.S. immigration law and court proceedings operate with a separate and unique interpretation of "due process," California farmworkers are subject to employment laws that are unique to the farming system and different from those affecting workers in the manufacturing sector (Martin and Taylor 1995c). The differential treatment of agriculture and agricultural workers and their exclusion from most protective labor legislation originated primarily from government's attempts to deal with the agricultural crisis of the 1920s. Agriculture has consistently been presented as a special case that should be governed by separate laws in order to protect the nation's food supply. Other arguments include the seasonality of the work, the unpredictability of weather patterns, and the perishability of agricultural products (Heppel and Papademetriou 2001).

Another contributing factor to the paucity of protective legislation for farmworkers has been the decades-old, generally romanticized perception of American family farms. A distinction between farming as a way of life on Midwestern farms and the profit-seeking motivation of California's corporate agribusiness has never been made legislatively (Mar-

tin 1989; Martin and Taylor 1995a). The confusion has resulted in government legislative intervention in agriculture that has favored large, commercial farms, still perceived as "family farms," over actual small and medium-size family farms with less political representation (de Janvry et al. 1988). The resulting principle of "agricultural exceptionalism" continues to guide national policy (Heppel and Papademetriou 2001).

An example that occurred in November 1999 illustrates this point. The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration proposed an ergonomics standard that would regulate workplace hazards that cause musculoskeletal (back and neck) injuries, the most common source of injuries and physical complaints among the farmworkers in my study. The proposed standard would cover workers in general industry but would exclude agricultural workers (Davis 2000).

Another example: As part of New Deal legislation, the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 was designed to curtail poverty among workers by establishing a minimum wage, discouraging excessively long hours of work, and eliminating child labor. Farm laborers were completely excluded from these legislated protections (de Janvry et al. 1988). California set the standard work week for farm and agricultural processing workers at sixty hours.

Agricultural workers are also not entitled to overtime pay for work performed beyond the federally mandated forty-hour work week. Furthermore, though the minimum age in nonagricultural jobs is 16 years, children of 12 or 13 can be employed in agriculture as long as their employment is outside school hours and takes place in a nonhazardous environment (Heppel and Papademetriou 2001). Currently teenagers 14–17 years old, very young teens, and preteens make up an estimated 6–10 percent of the U.S. harvest labor force (Aguirre International 2000).

Documented immigrant farm laborers lack privileges and supports that are extended to citizens. Their presence in the United States and access to benefits is directly contingent upon active labor force participation. They must have an offer of employment before entering the country. They can be deported if they are unemployed for a long period. They are eligible for unemployment insurance and workers' compensation insurance, but they may not receive state or federal welfare assistance until they have lived in the country for five continuous years (Wells 1996).

The National Labor Relations Act of 1935 provides employees with the right to organize and bargain collectively. However, farmworkers continue to be completely excluded from this law. The California Agricultural Labor Relations Act, signed into law on June 5, 1975, has provided some legal concessions to farmworkers, giving them the right to organize, the right to hold harvest-time elections, and the right to bargain collectively without employer interference. This law also provides an avenue for the determination of and prevention of unfair labor practices. An appointed counsel and five-member board, the Agricultural Labor Relations Board, was created to address farmworker complaints and unfair labor practices (Wells 1996). The effectiveness of the Board in supporting farmworkers with grievances is, however, entirely dependent upon the prevailing political climate in Sacramento and the political ideologies of the governor-appointed board members (see below).

Even with some semblance of protective legislation in California, farmworkers remain unhealthy (Villarejo 2001; Villarejo et al. 2000) and impoverished and continue to work long hours without appropriate compensation. At the height of the strawberry season in June and July in Watsonville, California, many spend up to 13 hours per day, six or seven days per week, bent over at the waist, picking strawberries in 90-plus degree heat.

Several farmworkers in this study are United Farm Workers or Teamster union members. Others are in regular contact with Western Service Workers in Santa Cruz, an organization that represents and supports low-income workers. Yet, in spite of their difficult employment circumstances, none of the farmworkers interviewed for this study appear to be knowledgeable of the very few rights and protections they do have under federal or California state law.

FARM LABOR ATTEMPTS TO ORGANIZE

Overall, one of the biggest fears haunting growers in their relationship with farmworkers has always been that of union organization among exploited workers. Along with the persistent fostering of prejudice against anyone "foreign," growers have always sought to maintain the status quo through four principal strategies: overrecruitment of workers for harvesting crops; pitting of ethnic groups against each other; repatriation programs; and manipulation of agrarian mythology to gain community support for undermining worker organizations and breaking strikes (Guerin-Gonzales 1985)

Historically, employers often provided separate encampments for laborers of different ethnic groups in order to promote distance and distrust among them. Myths were central in maintaining the caste labor sys-

Figure 11. *Los agachados* ("the bent over ones"), strawberry pickers, Watsonville, California.

tem in California agriculture by promoting Mexicans as transient workers who return to Mexico and minimizing the reality of their contribution to corporate agribusiness development in the state.

The remarkable success of Cesar Chavez and other core organizers of the United Farm Workers (UFW) in the creation of an enduring farm labor organization can largely be attributed to a unique and brilliant style of labor organizing. Chavez brought techniques used in community organizing from his work with the Community Service Organization to the task of organizing farmworkers. He named his initial organization the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA). His strategy involved building solidarity by offering services to farmworkers. By serving genuine needs and developing organizations within which farmworkers could develop trust, Chavez and the NFWA founders created a climate for forging bonds of solidarity among workers (Thomas and Friedland 1982).

Chavez and his group of organizers traveled extensively throughout the state, making personal contact with farmworkers and establishing information networks. Ethnic, cultural, and religious symbols were also used to promote unification. Most meetings were conducted in Spanish.

The community organizing phase of the movement was a time when an extensive organizational infrastructure of farmworkers was developed and solidarity among farmworkers congealed (del Castillo and Garcia 1995).

Chavez was successful in union organizing because he so brilliantly organized and forged alliances with multiple constituents, including consumers, church and political leaders, and students. Many alliances were formed with powerful community figures such as Father Donald McDonnell, a Roman Catholic priest in San José, and Father Thomas McCullough of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. Concurrently, he politicized farmworkers so that they engaged in huge public protests. The protests encouraged farmworker visibility and renewed public support for the plight of farmworkers (Kushner 1975).

By the summer of 1965, several social, political, and economic factors were in place to provide a fertile context for the development of the UFW and new protective farm labor legislation. As a result of the work of the Industrial Workers of the World and the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union, a precedent had been set for solidarity among farmworkers of all creeds, nationalities, and cultures. The exploitation of farmworkers by employers advertising jobs in excess of those available was exposed by the Wheatland riots. An ABC television documentary, *Harvest of Shame,* aired in 1960 and exposed the deplorable work and living conditions of U.S. farmworkers (Majka and Majka 1982). The Bracero Program had ended, and the civil rights movement was in full swing with prominent supporters such as Dr. Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. Everywhere among the country's youth, capitalist individualism was under sharp attack. In addition, an unpopular war in Vietnam was philosophically tearing the country apart. With their involvement in the Delano grape strike, Cesar Chavez and his farmworkers would become a lightning rod for a much greater movement of the time—a movement that included all those individuals who shared a commitment to end the injustices of racism, the war in Vietnam, the suffering of the poor, and the degradation of farmworkers.

The Delano grape strike developed out of a protest by Filipino workers who were members of the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) over wage inequities. Early in 1965, California growers in the Coachella Valley received a temporary dispensation from the labor department to allow the importation of braceros to harvest the grape crop. Braceros were to be paid $1.40 per hour. For the same work, Fil-

ipino workers received $1.25 per hour and Mexican Americans received $1.10 per hour (Kushner 1975).

In May, AWOC went on strike and won a raise for both Mexican American and Filipino workers. With continuing strikes, the Filipinos eventually recruited NFWA for support. The Delano grape strike covered a 400 square mile area and involved thousands of workers. The organizational efforts of the UFW that resulted in the strikes and national consumer boycotts were unsurpassed in the history of U.S. farm labor organizing. Initially three crops were targeted: table grapes, wine grapes, and lettuce (Kushner 1975; Wells 1996). Ultimately, on July 29, 1970, twenty-six Delano employers of more than 7,000 workers signed the historic table grape agreement. By 1977 the union had won 180 separate contracts to administer in the grape, lettuce, tomato, strawberry, and nursery industries (Thomas and Friedland 1982).

The UFW found a willing and militant concentration of farmworkers in the Salinas Valley. Many in leadership positions in the lettuce industry were ex-braceros. Having survived the injustices of the bracero era in the United States, they were highly class conscious, hostile to growers, and receptive to union activity (Wells 1996). Strikes involving Salinas Valley lettuce workers were also particularly militant and effective because lettuce workers tend to work in unified crews, putting organization and solidarity among workers in place before the strikes. The UFW initiated a paralyzing general strike in August–September 1970, which spread to and decimated the strawberry harvests that year (Wells 1996). Meanwhile, central coast turmoil was further enhanced by heated and often violent confrontations between the UFW and Teamsters regarding union representation.

Ultimately, the UFW was a major force behind the extension of the minimum wage, unemployment insurance, and workers' compensation insurance to farmworkers. It was also instrumental in the passage of California's Agricultural Labor Relations Act and the establishment of the Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB) in 1975. The chaos of this period of California's farm labor history is detailed in the Board's records; its Salinas office is at the top of the list for number of union election petitions and unfair labor practices charges filed from 1975 through 1981 (Wells 1996). The reverberations of UFW striking farmworkers in central coast agricultural industries continue to influence growers' relationships with farmworkers today.

The unanticipated death of Cesar Chavez on April 23, 1993, as well as dissension within the UFW curtailed union momentum and effectiveness in the following decades. By 1984 only fifteen of seventy grape growers in the Delano area were under union contract (del Castillo and Garcia 1995). The union won fewer and fewer elections, membership dropped considerably, fewer and fewer strikes occurred, and the UFW reduced the number of organizers in the fields.

By 1980, with the defeat of Proposition 14 and the election of Ronald Reagan as president, the country began to take on a more conservative mood. In California this resulted in the appointment of pro-grower representatives to the Farm Labor Board (del Castillo and Garcia 1995). The new representatives consistently ruled against the union in many of the grievances brought before it. Newly elected Republican governor George Deukmejian slashed the ALRB's budget and appointed board members hostile to the UFW. The number of unfair labor practice charges that were moved forward fell sharply. The UFW charged that fewer workers were willing to challenge their employers' conduct because they did not expect fair treatment by the ALRB. Ultimately, the UFW withdrew its participation from the ALRB completely (Wells 1996).

Though the current UFW staff and membership are but a small vestige of their size and strength during the 1970s, the union persists, in spite of the many political and economic obstacles it continues to encounter. Its longevity of over thirty years has earned it the distinction of being farm labor's longest-lived and most durable union (Thomas and Friedland 1982; Wells 1996).

Although Chavez and the UFW provided brilliant and effective organizational strategies that resulted in temporary victories for farmworkers throughout the state, interview data acquired in this study suggest that the UFW has lost its pervasive appeal among farmworkers. Indeed, many farmworkers expressed outright indignation about the organization and justified their indignation by citing a variety of complaints ranging from nonresponsiveness to union members' complaints to suspected graft within the organization. The *Los Angeles Times* corroborated these views in a detailed four-part series on the UFW in January 2006 entitled "UFW: A Broken Contract" (*Los Angeles Times* 2006). The articles allege that the UFW is no longer focused on organizing farmworkers to confront their oppressive circumstances but rather on garnering memberships and donations, while financing projects that frequently have little to do with the improvement of farmworker working conditions and well-being.

In the meantime, most farmworkers today continue to suffer the same

inhumane conditions and indignities of the past. Cesar Chavez is dead, and with the exception of some minor concessions and contrived grower appeasement mechanisms the plight of farmworkers remains as difficult as in earlier periods of the state's history. Farmworkers continue their lives as the poorest of the state's and nation's working poor and, in many instances, have once again become publicly invisible (Griffith and Kissam 1995; Jourdane 2004).

SEVEN

FARMWORKERS IN CENTRAL CALIFORNIA'S CORPORATE AGRIBUSINESS

People in California are slaves to their work.

—Consuelo Fernandez, mushroom picker, Watsonville, California

Estaría bueno andar como perro, digo, los perros andan con cuatro patas. Digo, a lo mejor no va doler ya uno allí.

It would be good [to walk like] a dog. Dogs walk on four feet. At least as a dog, one wouldn't be in pain.

—Roberto Fonseca, disabled strawberry picker Watsonville, California

It's 5:00 A.M. at Elena Esparza's Watsonville apartment in a low-income housing unit sandwiched between agricultural fields, far removed from the actual city of Watsonville. The alarm sounds, and Elena's hand emerges from under the warm covers. She gropes for the button on the alarm clock that will switch off the offending noise. While the rest of the family continues their slumber, she takes a few moments to sleepily review the events and expectations of the day. She checks the clock face again: 5:05, time to get up.

Elena nudges her husband Emanuel in an attempt to wake him. He worked twelve hours picking mushrooms yesterday and didn't arrive home till late. Neither Elena nor Emanuel have ever figured out what the odd odor that permeates his clothing at the *honguera* (mushroom farm) is. All they know is that, when he returns home from work, the first thing

he has to do is take off all his clothes and quickly bathe in order to prevent the odor from spreading throughout the house.

Emanuel and Elena emerge from their bed. While Emanuel gets dressed, Elena throws on a robe and shuffles to the two adjoining bedrooms to wake the couple's five children. As the oldest four children sleepily get dressed and wash up, Elena wakes and dresses two-year old Jaime. In a flurry of activity, she makes lunches for all five children, her husband, and herself while passing out granola bars to her four older children for breakfast on the schoolbus en route to school. She dresses quickly and takes Jaime to the babysitter, who lives in an apartment nearby. By 6:00, Elena and Emanuel's apartment is empty, as each family member enters the outside world to start their day.

Elena drives an old Chevy pickup to her job at Rancho Santa Maria near the Santa Cruz County fairgrounds. It's a half-hour drive from the family's apartment. On the way she experiences the familiar pangs of anxiety. "What if the police stop me? They'll confiscate my car and send me back to Mexico. What will happen to my children?" Fortunately, she's always made it to work without being apprehended. Because she is undocumented, she can't get a license or automobile insurance. She recounts with agitation in her voice, "If I'm ever stopped for a traffic violation, my whole world will fall apart."

As she drives along, with fields of strawberries and blackberries whisking by her on either side of the road, she is further plagued by thoughts of her husband's precarious work environment. Though he has a valid green card, he works in an agroindustry that is notorious for worker accidents. Four of their neighbors fell off the walkways surrounding some of the highest mushroom beds onto the concrete floor below and were severely injured. None have been able to return to work, and their disability payments are minimal compared to the money they earned in year-round work. Teenage sons of relatives in Mexico were forced to immigrate to Watsonville for work in order to continue the flow of remittance money to Mexico that supports other family members and disabled workers and their families, both in Mexico and in the United States. The disabled workers' spouses continue to work in the field.

Elena recalls the frightening images Emanuel created in her mind as he described his first days cutting mushrooms from the highest serial "mushroom beds" positioned from floor to ceiling. "My legs were trembling so much as I stood on the foot-wide walkways that I could hardly work. I was afraid that I'd trip, fall off the ramp, and end up paralyzed like our

neighbor, Gonzalo. I think I am gradually getting used to working in the high beds, though, and I feel much steadier on the walkway now."

By 6:30, Elena arrives at her seasonal job at Rancho Santa Maria. Her anxiety is allayed as she leisurely converses with other workers until 7:00, when the workers enter the blackberry and raspberry rows to begin the day's harvest. She will earn $3.10 per hour, plus $2.15 for each case of twelve baskets picked. When the berry harvest is plentiful—mid-May to mid-June and mid-August to October, Elena can pick three to four cases per hour, for an hourly salary of $9.55–$11.70.

On the other hand, when the berry bushes aren't producing abundantly, at the very beginning and end of the harvest season, she harvests only a single case in an hour, for an hourly salary of only $5.25, which is $1.50 below California's minimum wage of $6.75 per hour. To make matters worse, she loses her seniority with the company every two years at the end of the season. That's when her boss checks her green card and discovers once again that her Social Security number is bogus. She is then required to return to work the following season with a new fake green card, at the bottom of the seniority list. She and her boss have done this dance for several years now. They both know the routine well.

The benefits of seniority include the opportunity to work the longest and most productive stretches during the harvest season. Elena's documented co-workers are able to quit early at the end of the season because they can draw unemployment and financially survive the intervening winter months until the next year's harvest season begins. Their unemployment checks are just about equivalent to what their income would be if they picked berries during a light harvest for $5.25 per hour. So why work at all during this time?

Of course, Elena is ineligible for such benefits. She wishes that she had an unemployed female relative with a valid green card like her undocumented sister-in-law, Elsa Gonzalez. Elsa also immigrated from Huacao, Michoacán, and has used her mother's name and green card with a valid Social Security number for the past two years she has worked for the company. Since her mother doesn't work, Elsa works right alongside Elena in the blackberry fields and enjoys all the benefits of progressively higher seniority status over time. At the end of the season when the Social Security numbers are checked, Elsa passes the test with flying colors and is able to move to a higher seniority rank the following season.

However, Elena reflects on Elsa's *coyote* debt when she first arrived in the United States. Whereas Elena and her family arrived in Watsonville debt free because they earned money to pay for their *coyote* before cross-

ing, Elsa's first order of business when she arrived here was to work to pay back her family members who put up the money for her $3,500 border crossing (see chapter 4). As a new lowest-wage employee at the bottom of the seniority hierarchy, and with the inclement weather that plagued the region in 2001 and 2002, Elsa had to labor nearly an entire year as an indentured worker to support herself while paying off the debt. She was unable to save any money at all that year, but she was relieved at the end of the year when the balance due was finally cleared.

Elena works hard throughout the day, with 15-minute breaks at 10:00 and 3:00. She enjoys her half-hour lunch break at noon, when she can exchange information about family members with other relatives and friends. She reflects on the fact that, even though she loses seniority every two years, she is fortunate to be working in organic bush berry fields where she doesn't have to worry about her cotton clothes, sweater, hat, and *pañuelo* (bandana) absorbing the terrible odor from chemicals that Emanuel returns home with from the mushroom farm. She also is grateful that she doesn't pick strawberries and have to work all day bent at the waist. Furthermore, she is thankful for the plastic chairs offered by the company at lunchtime. Before this "benefit" was instituted as company policy, she and her co-workers ate their lunch seated on the ground at the side of the road.

It's late April, and today Elena will leave the fields early, at 3:30, after only seven or eight hours of work. She's gearing up for the big harvest that begins May 15. At that time she can expect to work 10 1/2 hours per day without overtime pay. She's pleased to have the opportunity to work and earn more money for her family at this time of the year, but she complains about the terrible fatigue she experiences at the end of each workday and on her one day off per week.

THE MEXICAN AGRICULTURAL LABOR FORCE

Nationwide, more than two million year-round and seasonal migrant farmworkers, including 100,000 children, work in U.S. agriculture (Oxfam 2004). Thirty-six percent, an estimated 684,000 individuals (Aguirre International 2005), are employed in California's corporate agribusiness each year by 35,000 employers (Campos and Kotkin-Jaszi 1987; Furillo 2001; Martin 1989, 2001; Martin and Mason 2003; Olvera 2001; Palerm 2000; *Sacramento Bee* 2001; Villarejo 2001). Forty-four percent of the nation's fruit, vegetable, and horticultural farm laborers are hired in California (Aguirre International 2005). About 95

percent of California's agricultural labor force is immigrant, and almost all workers are Latino from Mexico (Oxfam 2004).

Though there are no definitive accurate data regarding the number of undocumented workers currently holding down jobs in the United States, it is estimated that about half of farmworkers here, 25 percent of household workers, and 10 percent of restaurant employees are undocumented (Malone 2002; Perrin and Williams 1999). In California, undocumented farmworker estimates run as high as 85 percent (M. Jourdane, personal communication, 2005). One in ten farmworkers is a U.S. citizen (Aguirre International 2005).

In Monterey and Santa Cruz counties, 93 percent of farmworkers are Mexican or Mexican American and 97 percent are Spanish speaking (Parsons 2001). In contrast, 90 percent of California growers are of European descent (Zabin et al. 1993). Depending on the crop, 20 percent (Martin and Mason 2003; Aguirre International 2005) to 50 percent (Palerm 1991, 2000) of California's farmworkers are women. Women are broadly represented in the strawberry and bush berry industries of central California.

Monterey County was home to the third-largest California county farmworker population in 2000, with an estimated 86,941 farmworkers, including 46,687 seasonal workers. Santa Cruz County was home to the fourteenth-largest county farmworker population, with nearly 20,000 farmworkers. Though no official estimates are available primarily because of the large number of undocumented immigrants entering California, based upon housing demand alone officials in both counties agree that the migrant farmworker population increased significantly from 2000 to 2005.

FARM LABOR ROLES IN MEXICO AND CALIFORNIA

Most farmworkers view California farmwork as a form of drudgery akin to slavery, in which their labor is used to generate wealth for a frequently unknown, distant grower who ultimately profits from the harvest. When farmworkers whose families own land in Mexico were asked to compare their role as farmers in Mexico with their role as farmworkers in California's corporate agribusiness, the following comment made by Lorenzo Vasquez was typical: "In Mexico I farmed for me and my family, and we owned the land. In California, I'm an employee farming for someone else." Florencio Gomez expressed similar sentiments: "In Mexico, a farmer does all the work and the entire harvest is his. In California, one works for a company that owns the harvest."