

FARM LEADERS MAP STRATEGY ON UNIONS

Success of Chavez Group in West Stirs Worry in 8 Eastern States

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ESSINGTON, Pa. July 19—Leaders of the American Farm Bureau Federation from eight Eastern states met here today to map strategy for dealing with what the big farm organization called a "real threat" of unionization of farm workers.

Arthur H. West, president of the New Jersey Farm Bureau, said in an interview that a farm strike at harvest time would cause "sheer chaos," with a "drastic effect" on food prices.

He said Florida and New Jersey were likely to be major targets of organizing efforts by the United Farm Workers now that the union has organized field workers in California.

New Jersey, called the "Garden State" because of its many fruit and vegetable farms, is the nation's largest user of harvest hands from Puerto Rico. They work under contracts negotiated by New Jersey farm associations and the Puerto Rican government.

Last summer about 3,500 workers came to New Jersey under those contracts. Others went to other Eastern states. The Asociacion Trabajadores Agricolas, which has sought unsuccessfully to organize them since 1973, contends that they would be better served in contract negotiations by a union than by the government in San Juan.

Chavez Movement

The tiny Puerto Rican union lacked the resources to organize effectively, but recently merged with the United Farm Workers, headed by Cesar Chavez. Last March the Chavez union reached a compromise with the Teamsters Union after a decade-long jurisdictional battle in California. The settlement allows the Chavez union jurisdiction over field workers in California. It also frees the Chavez union to begin using its resources for organizational efforts in other states.

"Now a full-fledged part of the A.F.L.-C.I.O., the Chavez movement has gained considerable success and established sufficient roots to pose a real threat to agriculture in California and in other states," the Farm Bureau said in a "discussion sheet" distributed at today's meeting.

Reporters were excluded from the strategy meeting, which lasted all day, but Mr. West said in the interview that he was "very concerned" about a ruling by the California Agricultural Labor Relations Board that gave union representatives access to farm property to conduct organizing efforts.

"This is unheard of in industry covered by the National Labor Relations Act," the discussion sheet noted. The act gives employees the right to organize and bargain collectively with employers, but it does not cover agriculture.

The act bars secondary boycotts, but since the Chavez union was not covered it was able to gain considerable support and strength with national boycotts of grapes and other California farm products.

Secondary Boycotts

The Farm Bureau, the nation's largest farm organization, sought in today's meeting to determine whether to try to cope with the United Farm Workers by seeking legislation to end agriculture's exemption from collective bargaining as the way to gain protection from secondary boycotts.

But the discussion sheet noted that repeal of the exemption would put agriculture under the jurisdiction of the National Labor Relations Board without preventing the board from making an access ruling similar to the California ruling.

The meeting was conducted by the four month-old Farm Bureau Labor Study Committee headed by Elton R. Smith, president of the Michigan Farm Bureau. Mr. West, a committee member, presided. Attending were Farm Bureau leaders from New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia.

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