

Women & Children outside Farm Labor Camp

By Valley Migrant League Collection

This ca. 1967 photograph shows Hispanic women and children standing near plywood-sided cabins at a farm labor camp in the Willamette Valley. The photograph is from the Valley Migrant League (VML) collection. Between 1965 and 1974, the VML offered services to seasonal farm laborers in the Willamette Valley, including help with housing issues, education, job development, childcare, and counseling.

Some farm owners operate labor camps to house migrant populations of workers, many of which are Hispanic. Seasonal farm laborers often travel with their families around the Pacific Northwest, and the nation, to harvest a variety of crops.

During the 1960s, state officials and the public became increasingly aware of poor housing conditions in labor camps — most of which were located on private lands. State officials funded several studies of the housing conditions and closed the most dangerous and unsanitary camps, but the problem persisted.

In 1986, the Oregon Department of Labor reported that ninety percent of the 118 camps that officials visited did not comply with state regulations for health and safety. They noted poor lighting, structural problems, over crowding, poor ventilation, lack of running water and bathrooms, and the presence of vermin at many sites.

In 1991, the Community and Shelter Assistance Corporation (CASA), which works to improve farm worker housing in Oregon, reported that it was increasingly difficult for seasonal farm laborers to find affordable and decent housing. Many farm owners have told state officials that they could not afford to improve and maintain their aging camp facilities.

Further Reading: Nusz, Nancy and Gabriella Ricciardi. "Our Ways: History and Culture of Mexicans in Oregon." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 104, 2003: 110-23.

Gamboa, Erasmo. *Mexican Labor and World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947*. Austin, Texas, 1990.

Gamboa, Erasmo. "Mexican Labor in the Pacific Northwest, 1943-1947: A Photographic Essay." *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 73:4, 1982: 175-81.

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