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## The working and living conditions of migrant farm workers

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THE WORKING AND LIVING CONDITIONS OF  
MIGRANT FARM WORKERS

A Thesis

By

Hilario Molina II

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Texas-Pan American  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

December 2004

Major Subject: Sociology

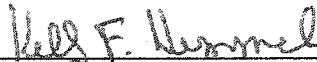
THE WORKING AND LIVING CONDITIONS OF  
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December 2004

## ABSTRACT

Molina II, Hilario., The Working and Living Conditions of Migrant Farm Workers. Master of Science (MS) Sociology, December, 2004, 79pp., reference, 28.

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the world of migrant workers, through first hand account, through the description of the living and working conditions of migrant farms by focusing on each camp (A, B, and C), by observing and describing the line of work, by discussing the social and cultural dynamics of migrant farm working—the role and culture of the migrant women, children, and alpha males—and by documenting the exploitation of migrant farm workers. This is a qualitative research, based on ground theory, which consisted of participant observation of these factors. There was no hypothesis due to the inductive nature of this research. The research focuses on a particular geographical area in North Carolina. Three labor camps were the source for this migrant farm worker population. Camp A is located in the center of a small town called Wilson. Camp B is located on the side of the road in an urban area, in the view of the general public and has access to the main roads. And Camp C is located in an urban area, but is completely kept from the view of the general public and requires traveling on a private road into dense wooden area. The researcher found migrant farm workers being exploited by crew leaders and farmers.

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

In the turn of the century, America experienced its first economical change from a manual labor agricultural (where farm work was done by hand) country to a mechanization method of production. A large percentage of the population found themselves in ruin and unemployed throughout the country. Thus, those farmers who depended on their large family to farm found themselves without work, so they started to migrate to the west toward California. Since, the destruction of most of the small farms in the mid-west and central states, the tenants and sharecroppers were the ones affected the most by the mechanization of agriculture. The migration of these people into the west is known as the Dust Bowl Migration of "Okies" and "Arkies" (McWilliams, p115. 1967). Due to the overflow of labor to the state of California, farmers exploited the situation by providing sub-standard housing and lowering wages. The abuse of migrant farm workers became visible to the public by books such as *The Grape of Wrath* and articles like *Factories in the Fields*. In response, the public pushed for reform of the agricultural system that exploited others (McWilliams, 1967), and it was the concern of the public, which set the foundation for a reform against the unfair treatment of migrant farm workers.

However, it was not until the late sixties that an individual had the courage to challenge the monopoly system created by large farming corporations and plantations. He raised his voice against the working and living conditions in which migrant farm



workers found themselves. Cesar Chavez was born a Mexican American in Arizona but due to instability in the state's agriculture, his family lost their farmland, and he found himself, along with his family, migrating to California. It was here that he encountered the mistreatment that affected all migrant farm workers. Until their work in the field was completed, according to a bonus system created by the farmer under which they would be paid at the conclusion of their work, they had to stay until the end of the season. When the Chavez family was ready to move on it was discovered that the crew leader had already departed and had taken their money with him (Pitrone, 1972). It was his experience as a migrant and credentials as a farm worker that gave him the credibility to address the issue of the common migrant farm worker problems in view of the general public but more importantly within the migrant farm worker's community.

Although Chavez was an important figure in the social movement that pushed for better working conditions for migrant farm workers, political protest was the mechanism by which substantial support was generated. By actions designed to capture the attention of a sympathetic public and paying attention to the justice of their cause (Jenkins and Perrow, 1977), the movement reiterated the importance of having polices that were intended to protect migrant farm workers such as the International Labor Organization (ILO).

The ILO was created by the United Nation Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and The Members of Their Families and served to address the issues of exploitation. In February of 1919, the Commission of International Labor was concerned about the living and working conditions of migrant farm workers. One of the major problems with the ILO was that the government of the host society called for

an international system that would safeguard the interest of the citizens of the host country more than the immigrant (Hasenau, 1991).

By the researcher providing the history of the living and working conditions, as well as policies that were intended to protect migrant farm workers from exploitation, he is able to demonstrate that the abuse and mistreatment of migrant farm workers is not a new event. The researcher interest is the farther study of the living and working conditions of modern day migrant farm workers and to note the extent of changes in today's conditions compared to those of earlier migrant farm workers. The inability to develop a hypothesis was due to this thesis being an inductive research. Without the development of a hypothesis, the researcher has to rely on inductive reasoning by means of observing, noticing a pattern, developing a tentative hypothesis, and finally, posing a theory. Therefore, this thesis focuses at the migrant farm worker community.

#### Other studies of Migrant Farm Workers

Many times when research or studies are conducted on the issue of migrant farm workers, they focus on exterior issues, such as how the public views migrant farm workers and the economic implications migrants have on the economy, instead of addressing issues that might prevent an undesirable outcome from the migrant community. In addition, much research does not provide an in-depth look into their lives where more focus needs to be directed. There are a number of studies that focus on the policies in place intended to hinder any possibility or prevent the exploitation of migrant farm workers. The focus of these studies, however, is on the view and opinion of the host society and not on the welfare of the migrant (Ottati, 2002). These policies and programs have contributed to the fight against the abuse of migrant workers but not necessarily to

the best social treatment of them. This thesis takes an in-depth look into the world of migrant farm workers and how they cope with their daily challenges. This thesis looks at the way migrant farm workers live, the type of work that they do, and the working conditions in which they find themselves. By this means, the researcher hopes to develop an understanding of the migrant farm worker's culture.

Before going any further, it is important to address the issue of who is a migrant farm worker. The researcher defines a migrant farm worker with accordance with the definition given by Manuel Escamilla, (1973, p.8) author of *Who is a Migrant Farm Worker?* A migrant farm worker is a seasonal worker in agriculture or agricultural related seasonal industries who finds jobs by moving each year to one or more work locations beyond normal commuting distance from a place he calls home when the crop season is over elsewhere.

#### The International Dimension of Migrant Farm Working

Furthermore, to understand migrant farm workers it is important to understand the pull and push effect that core and periphery countries have on international migration, because it is a contributing factor in the discussion making process of a migrant farm worker to migrate north. For example, segmented labor market theory sees immigration into a core country as a demand driven by a "chip and multitude" manual labor force, in order to comply with the economic structure of advanced industrial society. For, in the core, there is a shortage of workers who are willing to take jobs of low economic return relative to their experience, education, or skill within the secondary sector—work that the host society see as low paying and laborious. Therefore, immigrants (in this case, migrant farm workers), do the work that natives of the core reject (Massey, Arango,

Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino, and Taylor, 1994). Migrant farm workers are hired because they are unskilled workers who are open to performing the work that remains to be done in an advanced industrial society whose domestic workers are no longer willing to perform (Jenkins, 1978).

Second, researchers, as well as policy makers, have failed to explain control methods for the problem of exploitation that affects the migrant farm worker. Part of this failure includes methods intended to control migration inflow into the United States for the belief that an increase of legal migration has a positive relation to increase of illegal migration into the agricultural section of the host society—one is related to the other. In the United States (Keely, 1979), the notion seems to be that exploitation is due to the large amount of migrant farm workers instead of a flaw in the system itself. The exploitation is due to competition between migrant farm workers who offer their labor at the lowest cost and least suitable working condition undercutting each other. As a result the farmer/grower selects those in his vested interest, the cheapest laborer. Therefore, policy makers and researchers focus on the quantitative method to explain the overflow of immigrants because it gives a general analysis that is believed to be able to explain the issue of migrant farm working and control exploitation. However, “the system” allows loopholes for some to exploit the migrant farm worker. Therefore, I feel that in order to explain and understand a particular group of people (where quantitative method could not accomplish the desire outcome) who are not good candidates for random sample methodology, a more reasonable method of taking an in-depth look at the world they live in and their work is required in order to truly grasp an understanding of them, by means of a qualitative approach.

### The Uniqueness of this Thesis

In order to conduct this thesis, the researcher focused on a particular geographical area with a large migrant farm worker population. Labor camps were the source for this migrant farm worker population in the State of North Carolina; there were three camps that were observed for this thesis. Camp A is located in the center of a small town called Wilson. Camp B is located on the side of the road in a rural area, in the view of the general public and access to the main roads. The final camp that was observed was Camp C; Camp C is located in a rural area, but is completely kept from the view of the general public and requires traveling on a private road into a dense wooded area. The sample data was collected through participant observation, where the researcher partook in the daily activities and lived within the migrant farm worker community. This type of data gathering is different from quantitative sampling and will be addressed in the methodological section of this thesis.

The data collection was done through participant observation. The researcher lived and worked with migrant farm workers and he observed their living and working conditions. However, at no time did the researcher conduct any interviews in relation to the topic and most of the comments quoted by the research in this thesis consist of conversations that unfold in his presence or comments made to him without him initiating the topic. The Internal Review Board (IRB) had been more of an obstacle for the research and researcher than assisting in the pursue for scholarly excellence and was a contributing factor in not developing a questionnaire (see methodology chapter).

The researcher will attempt to give a descriptive account of the living and working conditions of migrant farm workers in the data collection of this research by

focusing on each camp (A, B, and C), and providing a detailed narrative and then comparing those noticeable differences by looking at the social and cultural dynamics of migrant farm working.

In the following chapter the author will provide an overview of the literature review, which will reflect, support and better explain the results that the researcher encountered when observing the migrant farm worker population. The literature review will discuss major topics such as the development of a migrant child, social networking, the role and culture of the migrant woman, children, and alpha male, and factors that influence the exploitation of migrant farm workers.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

There is literature that addresses the issues of migrant farm working. However, the literature focuses on how migrants relate to or influence the general population, economic system and the host society's assimilation process. There is limited literature that actually looks at the life of migrant farm workers. Most of the data out there is quantitative. There is very little research that takes an in-depth look into the work camps of migrant farm workers or the work these migrant farm workers do while adjusting to the demands of the work and the host society.

The ethnic group that makes up most of the migrant population in the United States is of Mexican ancestry; therefore, it is important to look at the dynamics within this ethnic group. This can only be accomplished by addressing the social and cultural norms that exist within the community (Durand and Massey, 1992).

In the foundation of economical and social structure of the Mexican culture, family tends to be the building block of the dynamics for upward mobility and the family also determines who gets assimilated into the norms of the host society. The importance of family provides a support system that allows for upward mobility and expectation for networking. "The Mexican family structure is described as a traditional patriarchy where women are up on a pedestal and despised for their weakness and passivity while the husbands dominate their wives and carry out their family obligation as they see fit," (Hawks and Taylor, 1975; Kossoudji, 1989). The culture of the migrant farm work is

subject to external influence of change such as the push of the host society to assimilate. For example, migrant farm workers tend to play more recognizable sports, in relation to the host society (Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kourouci, Pellegrino, and Taylor, 1994). The reason for speedy assimilation is because the fear of the migrant farm worker as being viewed as an outsider.

Jenkins and Massey see migration not as a push factor but more of a push-pull factor among a core country and a periphery country. The core host society needs laborers in order to meet its production quota while the periphery country has laborers but is unable to provide work in order to meet the demand of its people. For this reason there have been the *braceros* program—temporary immigration for seasonal jobs in agriculture—and an “alien invasion”—undocumented immigrants. However, this new wave of migration is primarily a labor migration.

The ability to use social networks provides a means of exploring work and support, “the social structure which establish[es] relationships between the migrant and the receiving community before he/she moves,” (Massey, 1987). There are two types of networking, strong ties and weak ties. Strong ties are networking that is developed among close family members. Weak ties are networking that is developed within friends or other individuals among the same community (Portes, 1992). The ability to network gives migrant farm workers the location of migration for the upcoming season. It informs them as to who (crew leader and grower) is providing standard housing and decent pay. It also gives them the means by which to relocate when they find themselves in unfavorable living and working conditions.



Dahlke, Hart, and Coles (Dahlke, 1945; Hart, 1999; & Coles, 1971) address the issue of the psychological development of individuals in work camps. While Dahlke looks at development as a whole in camps, Hart focuses on the social and psychical development of a particular child. However, Coles interviewed children who live in work camps and his data was collected over a longitudinal time frame of children from early childhood to early adulthood. Migrant children are prone to develop abnormal behavior that prevents them from becoming productive members of any society. They tend to suffer from indifference, boredom, apathy, and individual isolation, for they understand that the world is out of their control (Coles, 1971). The children are also exposed to the same working conditional as those to their parents (Heaps, 1968).

The living conditions and the culture tend to change with the location of the camp and the constant view of the general public. The phenomena of the different behaviors and living conditions in the work camps can be better addressed by Sarah Deutsch 's book *No Separate Refuge* were those who assimilate into the host society benefit from its rewards but in the process the person loses the tie with the old culture.

In farms where the farmer needs a substantial number of working hands, he hires what is known as a "crew leader." In essence, the crew leader is responsible for the activities that take place at work and at the campsite; the crew leader keeps track of the pay given to his employees. He is also held liable for the legal status of the people he hires therefore removing any legal liability from the farmer (Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino, and Taylor, 1994). The farmer hires him for his ability to get the job done and to control the workers, regardless of his methods in doing so (Jenkins, 1978; Heaps, 1968). It is this lack of control over the activities of the crew leaders that gives

the means to exploit the migrant farm workers (Aquilera, 2003). In the process the migrant farm workers are placed in substandard housing. "We run into all kinds of different housing, they all depend on the farmer. I understand why a farmer will not want to sink a lot of money into fixing up this camp, for they do not wish to spend more in something that is only needed for a short season (Heaps; 1968, p.110)." Where migrant farm workers are placed, they understand that there is nothing they can do but to accept it as part of them working and living there (Heaps, 1968).

The gender that seems to be most negativity affected by farm working is the women, for they are the backbone/foundation of the families' stability. However, they are in the middle of a host society, which promotes equality of employment and a traditional culture that holds them to those traditional norms (Littlefield, 1987; Raijman, 2001; Durand and Massey, 1992). For the man does not help the woman with the daily duties of the house for he must maintain the traditional machismo role in the presence of his peers (Hawks and Taylor, 1975). Although, women are limited as to their ability to raise their voice or question the discussion making process of the male figure, women are equipped to find other means of income by either through prostitution (Conover, 1987), or by cooking for the single men in the camps. This ability to profit contradicts the notation that women lack the knowledge of functioning as entrepreneurs (Raijman, 2001) but migrant farm working does place a large burden for the unexpected conditions contributes to the stress buildup (Littlefield and Stout, 1987). For example, a woman name Ana and her husband said, "I didn't know they would have to go to school! You told me to pack light! We brought mostly work clothes! The girls only brought a couple of dresses to wear in case there was an occasional day off! How can you expect me to

dress five children for a month in a gringo school when we didn't bring anything! I'll have to wash clothes daily after being in the field all day (Hart, p.13)! Another challenge for these women with children is that the crew leader does not like the idea that the children stay at the camp while the parents work, so the mother not only does the work that is expected of her but keeps an eye on her children's location at the end of the field (Heaps, 1968).

A crew leader might argue that reason why he does like the idea of the children in the camp is because it takes away an extra hand in the field. But the fact of the matter is that since children tend to communicate due to the exposure of the host society's language and culture, they are able to skip the crew leader and speak directly with the farmer of any given issues (Vold, Bernard, and Snipes, 1998). Therefore, migrant children tend to threaten the crew leader because they assimilate more easily in the host society (Heap, 1968). As a result, migrant children tend to become more successful into than their predecessors (Kossoudji, 1989).

It's important to recall that migrant farm workers are hired because they are unskilled workers who are open to do the work that those in the host society no longer wishes to do and they are sought after for their lack of the familiarity of the host society's language (Jenkins, 1978; Aguilera, 2003). This leads to the exploitation or what some call the super-exploitation of the migrant farm worker, for sometimes the crew leader (the person hired by the farmer to pick the crops) is in partnership with the farmer in exploiting the workers for a percentage of the product being exploited (Jenkins, 1978; Heaps, 1968).

However, when the migrant knows that he is being exploited by the crew leader he does not complain about the situation because their expected earnings would be three times what he would have earned at home and something is better than nothing (Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino, and Taylor, 1994) or their fear of being caught by the immigration authorities (Bosniak, 1991). On the other hand, there are those who utilize their social networks to find not only better paying jobs but also better living conditions. For a network is a set of recurring associations between groups of people linked by strong and weak ties (Portes, 1992). The purpose of networking is to provide the migrant farm worker with the abilities to find a better job and housing. But workers who do not utilize personal networks may miss job opportunities that are only available through social networking (Aquilera, 2003).

There are behavioral patterns that exist within the migrant farm worker culture activities that might seem deviant and socially unproductive to those who are not members of the same community (Richardson, 1999; Conover, 1987). The behavior that is learned is passed down and mimicked by the next generation of migrant farm workers (Vold, Bernard, and Snipes, 1998). There are behavioral patterns that hinder the productivity which is found not only in children and women but also in men, for they tend to show some type of psychological instability as well (Dahlke, 1945). "I'll ask myself what I ever did, maybe in some other life, to deserve this kind of deal. I know I am going to do it, I start with the wine, (Coles, 1971, p.65)." "I get so drunk that I'm dead, dead in my mind, and then if I live after that it, that's fine, and if I never wake up, that is fine too. We cannot decide on anything and owing everything to the crew leaders and people like him (Coles; 1971, p.66). Fist fighting serves as a mean of coping with

the demands of being a migrant farm worker. The fist fighting is monitored by the alpha male who ensures that no one gets seriously injured (Heap, 1968).

The information on the method used to gather data for this thesis is discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

To better understand the methods that were utilized in this study, it is important to discuss the usage of inductive research, ground theory, qualitative method, and nonprobability sampling. Addressing or explaining why current methods were used and why others were not, will allow for a better understanding of how the researcher conducted this thesis.

Due to the investigative nature of this research, qualitative methodology was selected as the most appropriate for this field research. For this reason a qualitative design was chosen to conceptualize the data collected from observing migrant farm workers.

Conceptualization is the mental progression whereby unclear concepts are made clear. Based upon the nature of this research, the formulation of a hypothesis would have been unsuitable for this research.

#### Inductive Theory

The inductive/induction theory method was better suited for this thesis because it consists of observing the working and living conditions of migrant farm workers. Induction/inductive moves from the specific to the general by usage of the logical model; it moves from a set of particular observations to the discovery of a pattern that represents some degree of order among all the given events—it does not explain why it exists, just that it does (Babbie, 2004; p. 25). In deductive theory, the researcher develops a question (hypothesis) and uses the logical model to test his/her theory. Due to the fact that a

deductive method develops a desired route in which a researcher seeks to find when conducting the study; it is welcome when attempting to conduct a study on the population of migrant farm workers, because the researcher observes the behavior of migrant farm workers within their own natural environment. As a result, any prejudging or hypothesis that the researcher might make would hinder the possibility of observing things the researcher had no prior knowledge of.

### Field Research

Field research—the direct observation of events in development—is used to develop theories through observation, in this case migrant farm working. Ground theory begins with a research situation that attempts to generate from the constant unfolding and comparing of observations (Babbie, 2004).

In this particular study, the situation is the living and working conditions of migrant workers. The responsibility of the researcher, within this particular study, is to be able to understand the world of the migrant farm worker. The understanding and collecting of data of this particular group is done through participant observation.

### Data Collection

Data were collected, in this thesis, by means of living and working alongside migrants and not by conducting questionnaires or surveys. This data collection was done by observing their daily activities and listening to their conversations and not by asking them questions. In ground theory, this method of data collection, in which the researcher partakes in the life style of the group in which he/she is studying, is known as participant observation. The ability to remain objective to the norms of the migrant farm worker culture is important in developing an accurate account of their working and living

conditions when conducting studies in which the researcher lives with the subjects he/she is attempting to observe. The researcher feared that if the subjects knew of the motivation of the study, the migrant farm workers could alter their behavior; therefore, the researcher did not inform them as to the study. The subjects had no knowledge as to the nature of the study or motive of the researcher.

#### Overcoming the Internal Review Board

The researcher was unable to ask questions because he would have to develop a questionnaire approved by the Internal Review Board (IRB) prior to the research. The dilemma with this is that the researcher did not know what he was going to encounter when conducting the study. Due to the nature that this was an inductive research, the researcher had no prior knowledge as to what to ask; therefore, he would have been limited only to the question on the questionnaire. Any thing else not mentioned, question that the research found to be important to the study, could not be used in the thesis because it violated the agreement between the researcher and the subject. The other dilemma was with the agreement form. Basically the agreement form stated that the subject knew and understood the reason for the question asked by the researcher, which in turn would have hindered the possibility of truly grasping the migrant farm worker experience because they could have altered their behavior due to their knowledge of being observed by the researcher. The greatest fear of the IRB was that the researcher, prior to this thesis, had another thesis topic in mind, *The Understanding Coyotes* (Smugglers), but the IRB made sure that the thesis never got off the ground—according to them it was too dangerous of a topic for the researcher. As the result, this is the new thesis topic for the researcher because of this interference of the IRB. Therefore, the



researcher felt he would still be able to grasp the life of a migrant farm worker without asking any questions and relying more on other forms of communication, such as body language and their interaction with one another.

#### Qualitative vs. Quantitative

“The distinction between quantitative and qualitative data in social research is essentially the distinction between numerical and nonnumerical—data concepts of ideas or terms” (Babbie, 2004; p. 26). Quantitative research is based on an objective analysis on numerical findings produced from observation. In contrast, “Qualitative research is the non-numerical explanation and interpretation of observations for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationship” (Babbie, 2004; p. G8). The ability to use qualitative analysis allows the researcher to convey insights that quantitative data will not permit and would overlook.

#### Nonprobability Sampling

The most basic type of sampling in quantitative is known as random selection sampling research. In random selection each element has an equal chance of selection independent of any other event in the selection process; therefore it is known as a probability sampling—meaning that it is a representation of the whole population (Babbie, 2004). Therefore, due to the fact that when observing migrant farm workers the data collected is not a representation of the whole population but rests more on a cluster of individuals who make a specific population, this thesis is a nonprobability research. Thus, in qualitative research, the sampling tends to be purposive/judgmental rather than random.

In the next chapter the researcher goes into a descriptive narrative as to the living and working conditions of migrant farm workers by focusing on each camp (A, B, and C), by describing the line of work, the social and cultural dynamics of migrant farm working, the role and culture of the migrant woman, children, and alpha male, and the exploitation of migrant farm workers.

## CHAPTER IV

## DATA COLLECTION THROUGH PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Data collection was conducted by participant observation of migrant farm workers. This data collection was done by observing their daily activities and listening to their conversations and not by asking them questions nor by conducting questionnaires or surveys, but more by means of living and working alongside them. But first it is important to state how the researcher gained entry into the working and living condition of the migrant farm worker's population and developed rapport.

The researcher was able to gain acceptance due to his ability to mimic their behavior patterns. However, the researcher gained entry into their working and living conditions by means of utilizing his weak social ties, for he had asked a close friend of his if he knew anyone who migrated or someone who needed workers. It was he who set up the researcher in the first Camp (Camp A). The other camps were discovered by the researcher asking the other workers if any of them knew of any other camps within the area, within 5 to 20 miles a distance that the researcher would be able to walk in a day or a day in a half. The researcher spend a week a half in each camp. Due to external influence and internal problems the researcher was only unable to observe three camps.

Labor camps were the source for this migrant farm worker population in the State of North Carolina. There were three camps that were observed for this thesis and there were more then 30 people in each camp. Camp A is located in the center of a small town called Wilson. Camp B is located on the side of the road in an urban area, in the view of

the general public and access to the main roads. The final camp that was observed was Camp C; Camp C is located in an urban area, but is completely kept from the general public view, requiring travel on a private road into dense wooded area.

This section of the thesis gives a descriptive account as to the living and working conditions of migrant farm workers by focusing on each camp (A, B, and C) and providing a detailed narrative of the camps and the people who lived there as well as the work they do and the culture of the migrant farm worker and how they are exploited.

### Camp A

Walking through the door of the first campsite was exciting. The negative thing though was that nobody cares to socialize, for they all seem to be in their own little world. They give a quick stare and shake their head in greeting or they just look away as though not interested in knowing who the new person on their campsite is. The only person that attempts an effort to make the person welcome is the crew leader. He introduces the new comer to the people with whom he will be living with for the duration of his stay in the camp.

### Housing Camp A

The cold air escapes from the two-bedroom apartment when the crew leader opened the door to the place where the researcher will be staying. The first thing that one sees when entering the apartment is the kitchen with its stove, refrigerator, and dining table. The walkway of the kitchen is narrow and more than one person when walking through there could become challenging (See Appendix I Figure 1). The table is made of wood of a light brown color. The table is kept in ready for anyone to use, for nothing is on the table that might require another roommate to move things off the table. This

might take away from their time, especially if the person is getting ready to go to work. In the morning, men sit together and converse about the activities of the day, and for most, the kitchen is a place for preparing their lunch and not a place for breakfast. They sit there drinking their coffee while they wait for usage of the stove. Others prepared their lunch the night before; therefore, they use the morning time for extra sleep.

The order as to who uses the stove and sits at the table is set by whoever wakes up first. The two- bedroom apartment has a bunk bed in the living room; it is understood that the smaller man of those sharing the bunk bed sleeps on the top—for health reasons. It will be less damaging for a lighter person to fall onto a heavier person than it is for a heavier person to fall on top of a smaller person.

Everybody is encouraged to keep the apartment clean, if they wish to get their deposit back at the end of the season. This keeps each person in the apartment in check when it comes to cleaning up their share of the place. From their first paycheck 100 dollars are withheld for any future damage (damages that are not normal tear and wear) that might occur to the apartment. However, at the end of the work season, the money is returned to the person, along with a bonus for a job well done. The migrant farm worker however is not asked if he/she wants the money withheld for it is understood that if the person wishes to stay at the campsite, the money is deducted with no questions asked. Since a majority of the workers claim that the pay is good, they do not seem to mind the deduction.

#### Location of Camp A

The first camp is located in the center of a small yet very important town, the town of Wilson. Wilson is known for its tobacco auctions. The farmers come into this

small town when their product is going to be auctioned off to tobacco manufacturing companies. The camp is near the heart of the small town to the extent one can walk to the downtown area within five minutes. However, the camp is in the less productive side of town in a section of condemned buildings. Thus, it gives the area a post-Depression feeling, for it represent a once productive section of the town but now is left with empty buildings with broken windows. The campsite itself is kept clean even though its location might not be. At Camp A, migrant farm workers are prohibited from either drinking in plain view of the near-by public or causing domestic scenes in the view of the general public.

#### Behavior in the Camp A

There are two small beds in each room with a small personal closet for them to put their personal items in. The floor is carpeted and plastic sheet covers are placed on each mattress. Some men complain that the place is too crowded for housing six men at the peak season. Everybody wants to cook breakfast in the morning and take the first shower when getting back from work so conflict tends to build between the roommates. The agreement is that the first one up and the first one in (from work) is the first one who uses the kitchen or the restroom. The place seems more like an apartment complex than a campsite. The camp is located in the center of town and there are signs posted along the fence of the campsite which warns people that this place is a crime watcher area. However, it is unclear who the crime watchers are— the community surrounding the campsite or the people living inside the campsite.

Before the sun sets, the camp is in complete silence; the people there begin to gather themselves, while others cross the street that leads to the playground near the

campsite. The playground allows for the workers to unwind by giving them the opportunity to partake in a friendly game of basketball, volleyball, or softball.

There is a feeling of individualism among those in the camp. For example, those with automobiles can go fishing for fresh water catfish in a near by pond, while others visit “the strip” where prostitutes roam in the late evening. However, by the weekend, the crew leader gathers members of the camp to partake in a competitive game of volleyball or basketball. The players demonstrate their lack of skill in the more Americanized sports but they play anyway. What is unique in these games is that the team that loses must buy Gatorade for the winning team.

Gambling is a common practice for those who live in the camp. As some of them say, “My whole life is a gamble; it’s about taking the best chances and hoping for the best.” Even when working in the field, they gamble as to who can finish his tractor list the fastest or which team from the native land is the best. They see their life as chance and they have fatalistic view when confronting daily challenges. It is obvious that they see their lives are in the hands of a higher power and they do not have control over what happens to them; therefore, they gamble and hope that the unseen power will be on their side when betting.

#### Fear at Night in Camp A

A fence measuring about six feet in height corrals the campsite. The residents of the camp tend to keep to themselves and attempt to keep a low profile—they wish not be noticed by those in the community. They only leave the area when they need to purchase things that are needed for their survival as migrant farm workers. Consequently, exploration of the small town is kept to a minimum and when walking, in the evening or

day outside the campsite, they do so in small groups of two or four. Those with cars ask those in the camp if anyone needs anything from town or if anyone would like to go to town with them. There is an overwhelming fear of having to walk at night outside the campsite for health issue reasons. The legend in the campsite is that, in the earlier years, a worker had gone out of the campsite by himself one late evening. The man returned to the campsite several hours later and he had been beaten and robbed by someone from the nearby black community. The perpetrator was never apprehended. The story was believed to be true because one of the workers in the camp knew the person that it had happened to. However, when one asked the person who apparently knew of the person he quickly stated that it had happened to a relative that he had worked with the previous season and that the relative of the victim had told him of the story—urban legend. It is unknown if this story is true or not but it does keep the residents of the camp from going out late in the evening or walking by themselves.

#### Camp B and C

The days are long and tiring and everyone looks forward to a shower, meal, and a well needed rest. The sleeping quarters are not very welcoming so the workers spend as little time confined to the room and instead sit outside underneath patches of shade that the sunset has provided.

In the middle of the summer, the rooms become an oven and for those who have not been fortunate to purchase a fan from their trips to town, the heat is unbearable (See Appendix I Figures 2 and 3). Others have made their personal space fit their needs by moving the refrigerator from the empty rooms and removing the light-bulbs from those rooms as well. So when a new migrant farm worker moves into one of those empty



rooms, he is left with no appliances or electricity. As a result, he must scavenge from the other men in the camp in order to keep himself from sleeping in complete darkness—later the researcher learned that there is an unwritten rule that newcomers are easy prey.

#### The Rooms in Camps B and C

Everyone tries to make their room express their personality. Those who consider themselves “players” (an individual who has lots of sex), place magazine-covers or calendars of women, with little or no clothing, on their walls. Others hang pictures of their favorite soccer teams. Almost everyone has an image of the Virgin Mary or a particular saint hanging on the wall. The more items a person has in the room reflect his ability to make the best of any given situation. The crew leader trusts this person who is able to make the best of any given situation, and the crew leader gives him more responsibility. When the crew leader comes to chat with the farm workers, he notices which particular worker has already made himself at home. The crew leader sees this individual as being more reluctant to pack and leave the camp at any given hour. Those who have very few personal items in their room are blackballed by the crew leader and are given the leftover work, because the crew leader knows these individuals are more likely to pack their things in the middle of the night and leave the camp.

#### The Kitchen in Camp B and C

The walls are stained with a black, thick, sticky substance created by the two stoves (See Appendix I Figure 4). The kitchen only provides space for four different people at any one time. The two stoves have four burners but each person limits himself to two burners so that others are able to cook as well. Unlike the first camp where the first to awake is the first to cook, here some individuals cook while others prepare for the

day. Then they rotate, and those who cooked leave the kitchen to prepare their things while someone else takes the empty burners and cooks their meal. They each have their turn. For example, when the researcher arrived at this camp he was one of the first to awake to cook breakfast being that he was accustomed to the practice of the previous campsite. When he entered the kitchen, he was welcomed with confused looks and was asked why he was there so early. "You sure awoke early, young man," they told him. A gentleman who had helped him settle in the day before informed the others that he was new to the camp: they replied, "Oh! I see." Later the recent arrival found his place in the cooking order, and he learned that families are the first to cook.

The women get up to fix a quick breakfast and the meal for the rest of the day while the husband and older children wake the rest of the family members and prepare the items that will be needed for the job. Some women are fortunate to find themselves cooking not only for their families but also for single men in the camp. The men pay the husband a weekly payment for having his wife prepare their meal of the day for them. The women make the best of the situation they are in.

#### Restrooms in Camp B and C

The restrooms and showers are no different from the kitchen in the sense that there is an unwritten schedule as to who showers at what time. Those who do not use the kitchen early in the morning use the shower at that time. The men lineup against the wall of the restroom and wait for their turn to use the shower. The toilets are next to the showers (See Appendix I Figure 5). The only thing separating one from the other is a decaying moldy plywood shower and toilet wall. One person could be sitting in the toilet, having conversation with the person next to him who is taking a shower. The

danger in using the restroom and showers has to do with the constant wet floor so one must learn to walk like a duck while dragging their feet in order to keep from falling on the cement floor.

#### Mattress

As tired as the body might be, sometimes it is a blessing to get out of bed, not so much to see what the new day brings, but more to get off of the uncomfortable mattress. When the researcher arrived at Camp C, he found the room empty. The only thing in the room was a bed frame. The person walks to a shed made of decaying wood located near the campsite (See Appendix I Figure 6). The shed has no door to keep snakes and other rodents out from roaming inside the place. The room is misty and dark. The mattresses are stacked on one another or thrown against the wall of the room. The mattresses are stained with blood and other fluids from previous owners, while others are literally falling apart with the springs sprouting through the mattress. The story goes there was an individual who slept on a mattress with the bedsprings sprouting out of it. He slept still in fear that any movement to any side of the mattress might cause a scrape on his face. The newcomers are left with whatever they are able to find. Usually, the best mattresses have already been taken by the veteran workers, so everybody else is left to select the best of the worst or at least one that will last through the season. When one lies on the mattress, one does not think of its previous owner or the health of that person. Thinking of such a thing will only make the situation more discomforting and takes away from much needed rest. No one complains about their living condition because they say that there are other people in other places that have it much worse, and for some farm workers these conditions do not compare to the living situation and conditions of their native land.

## Sleeping Quarters in Camps B and C

The best way to describe the area where the men sleep is long decaying wooden frame in the shape of a military barrack. There are no glass windows, only a window screen that protects the person from the mosquitos and a room that allows little air to enter into the 11' by 15' living space. A piece of plywood with latches hangs from the exterior wall, which allows the person to close the screen window in order to have some privacy or at least protect himself from the weather. The interior wall consists of a one-sheet plywood. Although the plywood is intended to provide personal space, or to some extent the comfort that comes when having such a luxury, there is no such thing as privacy for anyone and everyone can hear the conversations taking place in the other sleeping quarters. For example, if the radio is playing two rooms away, one can hear the music and is able to sing along to the song if one wishes to. Other times, the voices of couples are heard fighting over financial or marital problems.

Every night the music echoes through the thin walls and bass sounds can be heard until midnight. After the stroke of midnight, throughout the camp everybody is resting and if any sound is made after this hour it is quickly made known that it is not a welcome activity and the noise is quickly silenced. At six in the morning the sound of the Latino music picks up from the previous night—it is the wake-up alarm for those who do not have alarm clocks. It is a welcoming sound because it helps everybody in camp wake up so no one complains. After the music rumbles, the sound of banging on the wall begins; “*Ya levantate wey*” (Get up, dude) or asking for personal items such as gloves, Ben Gay, head cover and many others items are done through the same manner.

In the morning, one hesitates getting out of bed because the floor is cold. The toes curl when they touch the cement floor. When the plywood that hangs over the window is left open, moisture tends to develop on the floor, causing one to lose their balance and fall to the hard surface. One must be careful when walking half asleep. This happened to a middle age man that tried to jump out of bed one morning and fell to the floor. Afterward, everybody teased him and believed that his falling had nothing to do with the wet floor but had to do more with his drinking habits.

#### Welcoming the New Worker

The rows are long and one can only imagine how long he/she has to travel before reaching the end. For some migrant farm workers this is an everyday event but for the new arrival, the researcher, this is the first time that he stares at these perfectly lined columns of field rows. The first day, the other pickers treated them with indifference. The day seems long for this individual who had recently arrived to the campsite. His day consisted of isolation from any human interaction and only his thoughts to keep him company. If any form of communication erupted between the new worker and a co-worker it was usually in the form of a short and direct reply to the question asked. Even when greeting others it was done as a passing motion with little or no eye contact. The veterans observed every aspect of the new person in their midst. They observed his style of work dress and his ability to communicate in the common language, Spanish.

#### The Nursery

At seven in the morning, the bus drops the workers off at each section of the nursery. The nursery is divided into three sections: Section A which is at the entrance of the nursery, Section B, which is half a mile down a hilly road from section A, and Section

C, which is the center of operation—the main office. The nursery is located along a blacktop, narrow, and hilly road. Houses are scattered along the road but are blocked from view by pine trees growing between them. This gives the nursery an isolated feeling and lack of visibility by the general public.

As one approaches the nursery, one cannot help but admire the scene of colorful flowers in their pots. When unboarding the bus, the aroma of the different species of flowers fills the air and one stops to appreciate the moment for a few seconds, with the sprinkler system sounds in the background as the flowers get their regular morning shower. However, admiring the scene is short-lived and one rushes to the time clock in order to clock-in before the hour hand strikes seven. Everybody knows with whom and in what subsections they are supposed to work. There are those who only drive tractors and work on commission, while others relocate plants. For those driving tractors, every load these workers complete is based on a list that is given to each of them on the type of plants necessary for a particular load that needs to be shipped out. However, not every tractor driver is given the opportunity to drive a tractor, especially near the end of the season. For example, if for that day the company only needs three tractor drivers but seven are available in that particular section, then the workers tend to resolve the problem themselves. When this occurs, the men draw numbers from one to seven, depending on the number of tractor drivers in that section, and they hold on to that number as the foreman picks the number from the day's lotto hardhat. Those men whose numbers are called out drive the tractor for that day, while the other men have the option of working for an hourly wage with the other migrant farm workers, or go home. Surprisingly, a majority of the men who do not get picked to drive choose to go back to the campsite

instead of working for an hourly wage or with the other migrant farm workers. The ability to drive a tractor is more than a better position, it is also a job that is looked up to by the other migrant farm workers. Not everybody who works in the nursery knows how to drive or wants to learn how to drive a tractor in fear of causing damage to the tractor or worse, getting the order of plants wrong. Therefore, some of the people in the camp do not wish to take risks that might label them as bad workers; so those who do are seen as individuals confident in their abilities. As a result, tractor drivers are hesitant to work for hourly wages because they wish to maintain that position of respect. They enjoy being seen as dependable and independent of supervision a quality that sets them apart from the other migrant farm workers. So much so that the tractor drivers choose to drive their personal automobiles to the work site, while the rest of the people ride to work in the crew leader's bus.

#### Break room

"It's break time," someone said. When looking at one's own watch, it shows 5 minutes until the proper break time, but everybody knows what time it is when they start to walk to the break area. They estimate the time it will take them to get to the break/rest area to insure that their work does not interfere with their break, which is their time. For that reason, they leave whatever project they were working on so when they get to the break area it is exactly time for the break. They do not leave the break area until the break time is over, so they return to the worksite about 5 minutes after the break time. Arriving to the worksite 5 minutes late is intended to serve as a psychological state of mind more than trying to cheat the farmer of those five minutes. The worker sees it as 5

minutes less of the body doing actual work (stooping over the plants, picking them up from the tips of the fingers) before the day is over, or at least that is what they claim.

#### Even the Gas Station has Shade

The break area that was created for the workers is in the shape of a dome with a dark gray tarp with small holes. This is a form of a shelter from the hot summer heat (See Appendix 1 Figure 4). The doors are kept open to circulate the hot air out of the shelter and bring in the cool air. The problem with the official break area is that the holes in the tarp allow rays of light to penetrate and increase the room temperature, causing a green house effect. Instead of staying inside of the break area, workers have found an alternative to the break area—an unofficial break area. Next to the break area is a family cemetery, dating back to the turn of the century, and within the center of the cemetery there is a tree that provides shade and a large area extending further to open space. Someone in the office or the workers themselves thought this would be a good place for an unofficial break area, so three wooden benches and a water jug for washing hands were placed next to the cemetery to accommodate the migrant farm workers. The new break area was intended to provide comfort to the worker but with time, and a thunderstorm that tore the old tree in half it has become as uncomfortable as the official break area.

The migrant farm workers complained among themselves about the dust that covered the air when the tractor drivers zoomed across the break area, leaving them gasping for fresh air. There are others who claimed that the smell of the gas tanks next the new rest area was making them dizzy. The workers in this section did not understand



why the gas tank has a shelter and they do not. Some of them joke, “We should have been gas tanks.”

### Learning the Ropes

The worker sits in the office and watches a video that shows workers how to handle chemicals and areas that have been sprayed with chemicals as well as the clothes one must wear when working in such an environment. Afterwards, a video that explains the safety issues when traveling on the iron flat beds of the trailers that are pulled by the tractor is shown to the worker before being hired. For example, legs must remain inside the bed at all times and must not dangle along the side of the iron flat bed (Appendix I Figures 7 and 8). Also, a worker must wear eye protective gear when working near the plants—they are encouraged to protect the eyes from long branches that might penetrate the eye, causing serious injury. However, the greatest focus is placed on the handling of the plants. For example, the desired way of grabbing a plant is from the container and not from the plant itself because this could cause breakage and the plant would die before reaching its destination. Grabbing plants wear on the hands, forearms, and fingertips. When relocating plants, a worker must grab three small plants in each hand at the same; each plant weighs about a pound apiece. The first night of rest is visited by cramps and pain in the limbs of the body. After a few days of work, people begin to socialize and offer suggestions as to how to work faster with limited strains on the arms and other parts of the body. The suggestions are welcome by those who have little knowledge of how to prevent further injuries to themselves.

The greatest tip given to the new comer was to wear his safety glasses when a foreman approached the worksite, for they would not hesitate to send a worker home if

not wearing them. During the slow down of the plant season, the foremen are out looking to get the least amount of workers needed for those days, so they look for workers who are in violation of any company policy. The workers find this humorous. They recall, "During the acme of the season they look away when any of us were in violation of company policy. If any of the workers did not like to wear their protective eye gear they do so without reprisals from either the foremen or their assistants." The migrant farm workers understand that while there is a demand for their labor, they have a little control over how they work. It is at the peak of the season that the crew leader demands things from the farmer. For example, it was explained that the only reason the camp rooms have air-conditioning was because the crew leader confronted the farmer and explained to him that if the workers had a comfortable place of rest it would increase the productivity of the workers. This a problem the farmer faced in the past with other crews who did not produce the quota for that season.

#### Picking Cucumber

The full size eighteen-wheeler made its way along the path created for it. The path was located between rows of cucumbers. The vehicle slowly moved forward as the pickers advanced to the other end of the field. Those poor individuals who could not pick as fast as the others quickly found themselves traveling a greater distance to unload their goods compared to those who were in front and leading the truck. The truck goes at the pace of the people in the lead. However, once the first few individuals reached the end of their row —they would return from the other end of the row of the last individual to ensure that everybody stayed together, while others helped their family members or close friends finish so that they are able to get a good row on the way back. By finishing first,

the pickers can select a good row (a row with a lot of cucumbers) compared to those who got whatever was left. The picker left his bucket resting on top of the row when he/she went to the rest room or went to get a drink of water. Putting the bucket on top of the row tells the other pickers that someone already has that particular row, so they move to the next one. Some pickers wait for the truck to select its path, then they rush to get the cucumber row nearest it. This allows them to travel a shorter distance—meaning they are quicker to get to the truck and back to his/her row of cucumbers.

The people on the eighteen wheeler, called out “*Animo, raza*” (motivation my people) as pickers hunched over the rows and the thump sound of the cucumber falling into their buckets was heard. The people on the truck do not have time to watch over the pickers as they stand over them from the bed of the eighteen-wheeler. If they are not careful, a bucket filled with cucumbers could smack them on the head. Some pickers were quick to return to their rows that so they did not have to make eye contact with the person on the truck. Eye contact only lasted a second, but that was enough for the picker to believe that the individual on the truck had seen him even before the person on the truck has time to react to the picker yell, “*Hay te va*” (here it goes). The bucket of cucumbers is tossed into the air and the person on the truck wrestled with it to keep it from falling on someone also the person on the truck fancily tries to keep the bucket from slamming and damaging the bed of cucumbers. “Do not do that again,” he tells the picker, with a strong voice. The picker shakes his head in agreement as he walks away and placing the token in his pocket. The pickers know that the person on the bed of the truck has the authority to keep the token if she/he feels that the bucket is not full enough

or if the cucumbers are too big. The rule of the game is dump the bucket and leave before the dumper has anything to say, or at least the person can pretend not to hear them.

### Learning the Ropes in Picking Cucumbers

The tips of the fingers burned as they sunk into the hot, dry dirt. The plastic gloves only gave minimal protection from the powdery soil. There is a burning sensation as the moisture in the hand and heat meet. The long sleeve shirt, intended to protect the person from the sun, only increases the heat that surrounds the picker. The shirt sticks to the body, deleting the possibility of ventilation. The shirt, being so close to the body, allows the person to feel their backs roast underneath the unforgiving sun. There is no other option but to endure the pain because if one stands straight to loosen the clothes, it requires stopping and such an act can affect the picker in several ways. One, the pickers lose the pace that he/she was working at and therefore will fall behind. Two, constantly standing up straight and bending exhausts the body and eventually the picker will slow their pace because back pains will begin and affect the individual's performance.

The air is hot and it seems to take forever to fill *la cubeta* (the bucket) with the small number of cucumbers that the loaders, the people on the truck, are demanding from the pickers. One can only be amazed at the rate of speed of some of these pickers, for they are able to fill *la cubeta* within minutes. It is said that some of these individuals take home, at forty cents a bucket, nearly sixty dollars a day. The hands and fingertips gently bleed and after a while the pain of the peeled skin—at the base of the fingernails disappears when the dirt sticks and serves as a band-aid. After a while, the hands move in automatically for when one hand reaches into the bucket the other is feeling the base of the vines to find the cucumbers of the desired size. Seeing the condition of the new

worker, some of the veteran pickers took it upon themselves to assist this individual. Upon the selection of the return row, two men of small stature made it known to the others that they had the row next to the new individual—one on either side. As the truck made its way into the middle of the crowd of pickers, the men looked at the confused and tired person and began to pick next to him. They tried desperately to remain ahead of the truck. Without saying a word, they assisted the middle person by reaching into his row. At first the middle person, newcomer, was confused but it dawned on him that for some unexplainable reason they wanted him in front of the truck with them. It was not until they were no longer in the view of the loaders (people on the trucks) that the first man broke the silence. “You will never make money working that way. This is what you need to do”, he said as he picked cucumbers from the person’s row and placed them in his *cubeta*. As he was demonstrating, the other man began to talk while he continued working on his own row, “You place the small ones at the bottom. In the middle you put the very big ones with leafs and everything, because the leaves keep the cucumber from falling into the gaps, and you finish it off by placing the small ones at the top. This will help you with the loaders because they will only see the small ones when you hand them the bucket and again when they dump it, because the big ones are in the middle. After that the newcomer was able to keep up with the other pickers.

#### Lunch Break at the Field

They yelled from the top of the truck, “lunch break!” The “ahs!” and “ays!” were heard as the people arose from their hunched positions. They stood akimbo for a while enjoying the relaxation of their back. Some slowly made their way back to the bus that had brought them to the work site, while others ran. Others boarded a nearby vehicle that

was going to the nearest mom and pop store usually owned by the same farmer. Unlike the migrant farm workers, the sun does not take a break so by the time they take their lunch break; the sun was right over their heads. In the open field, there was a place where the pickers could hide from the pounding heat and no one dared to go near the woods because of ticks. Instead, they either stayed inside the bus, which cause a greenhouse effect or they sought the limited shade that the truck they were loading, provided. They sat cross-legged underneath the bed of the eighteen-wheeler where the sun was unable to reach them.

### The Tobacco Field

As the bus came to a complete stop, eight men made their way off the bus and stretch as their feet hit the ground. For the researcher, this was his first time picking tobacco. He recollected the conversation that took place on the bus. Some of the men asked the young man if he had done this particular job before. When he replied, “no”, the men looked at each other and some shook their heads in disbelief and distanced themselves to the window seat of the bus without further comment. The other men moved closer to the young man (researcher) and attempted to explain to him the importance of understanding the work that awaits them when the bus comes to a complete stop. Each man took turns trying to teach the methodology of picking tobacco to this confused young man. It was obvious though, that the most important thing was to keep up with the slow moving tractor.

The tractor started from the same end as that of the men and continued moving forward at a slow but continuous pace and anybody that would fall behind was left to travel at a greater distance to drop off his load. The manner in which the plant was picked

was itself surprising: The person has to reach around the sticky stem of the tobacco plant and rip off the bottom row of tobacco leaves that have turned a golden brown due to the pesticide and chemicals used to dry the plant. The pickers tucks the bundle of leaves underneath his arm and moves to the next plant, repeating the same cycle until reaching the other end of the row. While this was occurring, the person would be stooped over for the duration of the time it took him to reach the end. The only time a person was able to stand from his position was to drop-off the tobacco load from underneath his arms onto a flatbed being pull by the tractor. When the person fell too far back, it forced the other men to help him with his row, stopping the forward progress. Standing before the long green tobacco rows that measure between 4 to 5 feet in height, the newcomer could only wonder how his body would react to the stationary position of that of an old man having back problems (See Appendix I Figure 9). The men made their way to the rows.

Everybody already had their positions preselected and they knew exactly who was supposed to be next to each other. The younger and faster workers were further from the tractor and the older men stayed closer to the small John Deer Tractor. The men buttoned their long sleeve shirts and put on their work gloves. “*Muchacho*, (boy) take the row next to the tractor; it will help you to stay with the tractor and will prevent you from falling that far back” the person leading the group offered to the newcomer. He was not the alpha male nor the crew leader, but a person who the workers gave the power and authority to take charge of any given situation that might develop at the particular worksite based upon his ability to community with the foreman and his experience of the work that needs to be done. Offering the nearest row to the newcomer was not completely a sign of kindness, but it was more motivated by a collective goal in mind: to

finish the work with minimal strain on the group. By helping the newcomer they help themselves because everything goes smoothly—the job is done in a timely manner and everybody does his own work, pulls his own load.

“Can you believe it, just couple of days ago this field was all green,” a middle age man whose black hair fights to keep the invading white hair from taking over his head, told a young man to his right. The young man, in a sarcastic voice, replied, “It’s because about two days ago they sprayed the field.” Everybody laughs but the newcomer did not know what to make of it for it was clearly an inside joke that would later become apparent to those who were new to this line of work. The beaten down tractor that seemed it would die at any moment, made its way between the men—four men on each side. Each took their row but before commencing at the task at hand, they reached down to the ground and picked up some dirt; and rub it against the garden gloves. The men who spoke earlier said, “Hey, new kid” do what we are doing. It will help to keep the sticky black stuff off your gloves and it will prevent your hands from sticking together. Every time that you feel them sticky, get some more dirt.” Before the new worker had a chance to reply, a person listening to the conversation in the distance added, “Try not to breath too deeply while you are bent over. I know that is going to be hard since most of the way that is how we are going to be, but trust me you do not want to.” Again laughter overcame the group.

With spirits up, the tractor and workers started on the tobacco field. Jokes were exchanged and everybody was in a good mood. The moisture from the big tobacco leaves cleans the sweat away and the cool morning air keeps the body from over heating. The newcomer, the researcher, began to think that the other workers were just having



some fun with him, because after finishing the first row, he noticed he was able to keep up with the tractor and, most importantly, the other men. However, by noon they were still in the same field and by this time there was no moisture to wash the sweat away or pat any part of the body that had moisture. The cool breeze has become a scorching hot, dry air. By this time, the new worker was breathing heavily and falling far behind. Every 15 to 20 minutes there was someone on his row helping him keep up with the tractor. He kept breathing the air near the ground and he could feel the powder of the tobacco plant going into his nose and later into his mouth. It was clear he was not getting enough air through his nose. The other men kept telling him not to breathe the air near the ground because it was going to make him sick. For some, this day was no different than any other, but for the new worker he was glad that the day was over.

After leaving the field and boarding the bus, the new worker was vomiting the food that he had for lunch. A passing figure tells him, "We told you not to breathe through your mouth or too much air while you were down there. Now you have "tobacco poison." That evening the symptoms of tobacco poison became clear. The body will attempt to throw out any fluids inside the body to the extent that one feels his stomach is going to come out, an uncontrollable shake, cold sweat, and dizziness overcome the person. The next day the young man was unable to go to work due to his illness but the home remedies, proposed by those people in the camp who had it before, seemed to be working. By the following day, he was back in the tobacco field, still falling behind but not far enough to stop the progress of the other men. However, he still was unable to hold anything down. Anything that went into his system was quickly rejected—especially water. The sweat and the sticky substance of the tobacco—tar—irritate the

skin but nothing compares to the burning sensation when sweat and tobacco juice reaches the eyes, or any other part of the body that is exposed to the elements. By the end of the day, nearly everybody was doing their own share of the work. But on the last row, a man had to help the survivor of tobacco poisoning. It was later found that the best method to keep the body from throwing up was by drinking milk, orange juice or having a beer before going to work. Everybody claimed that it worked for them and never again did they have the problem with tobacco poisoning. It is unclear if it served more as a psychological cure or if it really was a physical defense against tobacco poisoning. Another possibility is that the body just becomes immune to the pesticide that was sprayed on it.

#### Women at Work

As they moved clothes up and down in a rubbing motion, they could not help but to splash water all over the wall and floor. The washing area was the breeding ground for moles and insects (See Appendix I Figure 10). Due to the hot days the water that typically runs from the sink to the floor either evaporates or channels its way to the grass at the edge of the sidewalk. However, there are times when the water stays for an extended period of time creating puddles in areas where the sun does not penetrate. The lack of sunlight creates puddles, which in turn become a nesting ground for mosquitoes. This only adds to the challenges that the women in the camp have to face due to that fact that they have to wash the clothes were it makes them an easy prey to mosquitoes. Those in the distance can hear the slapping sound as the women try to kill the insects, which interfere with their daily shore. Refusing to quit, they endure the present of the intruder. However, it is the sound of the crying of the children that makes them stop, for some the

mosquitoes are too much so they call it quits— for these poor women it means that the washing for the next day has increased to include the wash of the previous day. The children stay close to their mother even when such an action places them in an uncomfortable situation. The children pull on their mother for comfort and support from the biting mosquitoes. They pull on their clothes and the mother fancily tries to comfort the child and wash the clothes at the same time but some of the crying of the children goes unnoticed. The mothers knew the longer it took them to finish, the longer their children had to endure the mosquito invasion. The men knew what was happening at the wash area but they did nothing. Some women got frustrated and yelled to nearest child, “Go tell your father to come and get your little brother.” The child would return and behind them the figure of the father appeared. He walked slowly as if he had all the time in the world. He looked at his wife and said, “Are you almost finished, I’m hungry and so are the children.” He picked up the child and walked away. The woman returned to the task of washing clothes. The other women did not say anything for they have their challenges.

#### Gender and Height in the Field

Height and gender play an important role in the field. If the person is tall, he becomes more visible when standing at the edge of the loading truck in the cucumber field. If there are a lot of people crowding the truck, then he is able to dump the cucumbers himself and sign the dumper for the token. Some dumpers do not mind this because it makes their job easier but others do. They see the bucket laying over the pile of cucumbers, but they are unsure if it was filled to the top so they tell the person not to do it again. The person on the back of the truck, “the dumper,” has the power to tell the

picker to either stop/start putting a particular size of cucumber or else the next time he/she will not be getting a token for their work. The person in the truck, in many cases, is related to the crew-leader (niece, nephew, son or daughter) or the person is related to the alpha male of the camp and he/she is on salary instead of commission like everybody else. When there is a woman on the truck or carrying buckets, the men are prone to acting chivalrous by allowing the woman to go first by letting her to cut in front of the line. If she is on the truck, the men hold the bucket over their heads for an extended period of time until she gets it from them without her having to bend over the edge of the truck. When some men overlook this manner of chivalry and do not allow the woman to dump her bucket first, the men around him tease him on how his parents did not show him any manners and he becomes the center of jokes for the duration of day.

#### Meeting the Alpha Male

The newcomer is faced with new challenges: he needs to learn the order of the chain, which begins with the alpha male in the camp. Surprisingly, the alpha male is not the crew leader even though crew leaders are naturally placed at the top of the hierarchy. The alpha male is typically the right hand man of the crew leader, a person who has been with him the longest and who has a little understanding of the English language. However, this person does not master the language more than the crew leader for any crew leader would see that person as a threat because the foreman or farmer could choose to communicate with that person instead of the crew leader. Since, the alpha male spends more time with the employees than does the crew leader, this threatens the position of the crew leader. He fears that by building a relationship with the farmer, the farmer feeling more comfortable with the other person, the alpha male might take advantage of the

opportunity and next season, there might be a new crew leader in the camp, the alpha male. As a crew leader once stated, “the only thing that a person needs is to go to the labor agency, usually Manpower, and tell them that he wants to be a crew leader, they tell him the do’s and don’ts, fill out some papers and he is a crew leader.” Therefore, the alpha male knows enough to understand the instruction but not enough to provide input or ideas when communicating with the foreman or farmer. The role of the alpha male is to keep the crew leader informed as to the situation of the workers’ complaints and feuds. Furthermore, the alpha male is expected to resolve any dilemmas in the camp. Anything that is brought directly to the attention of the crew leader calls into question the ability of the alpha male of being his right hand man. The position of being the right hand man, the alpha male, is more of a symbolic role than anything else. Sometimes the position does offer economic and social gain. The job for the alpha male is easier than that of the common worker for he could be picking cucumbers in the morning for several hours and by the afternoon, when the heat and the work has taken its tolls on the human body, he could be asked to drive the truckers or relocate other workers to other fields. He might be lucky enough to drive the crew leader around in his air-conditioned pick-up. The social reward is that his family lives within the area of the other workers in camp, but they live either in a mobile home where he can be reached by the crew leader if ever he needs something. This means his family does not have to put up with sharing living areas such as the kitchen and the bathroom with those in the camp and this is a luxury that is sought by many migrant farm workers. A sign of respect is unquestioningly given to him and his family, and the people refer to him and his family as “*Don* and *Doña*” so and so.

## Here Come the Women

The men gathered around in the living room, in the house farthest from the camp. It was a house built for a large family, but the crew leader had converted it into a single man's house. The kitchen had been made into a storage room and had so many beds that allow very little personal space. "If there is space, then it is space enough for another bed," seems to be the mentality. On the weekend, the house is cleaned and so are the men. Everyone was covered in cheap cologne and they are wearing second-hand clothes. They laugh, tease and push each other around like children in the playground. "*Yo traía a Maria* (fake name) *en mi mente, estos dias,*" (I've had Maria on my mind) shaking his arm and jerking his body back and forth. They pushed each other around when they heard the car making its stop at the back entrance, away from the sight of the camp. For the number of men there in the room no one says anything about of who will go first. It was obvious who went first when one of the older men told a young, thin, dark-skinned figure, "Go tell him that they are here!" As the door opened, eyes widen as men rubbed their hands together in excitement. Two figures stood in the doorway, their full size blocked the view of the other woman making her way behind them. The wood cracked with each step they took. As the women entered into the house, the men parted and stood against the wall. Greetings were exchanged between several men and the women. The women asked the men about their work because the more there was the greater amount of money the men would spend on sex. They stood in the living room discussing prices and the order of business at hand. The men picked the women they wanted after the order and the price was agreed to. The room became silent. They all stood there waiting for the alpha male, who was in his mobile home with his family, to arrive. A thin figure

made his way to the door and stood there looking at the women. The woman who seemed to be the leader of the pack separated herself from the men and the other women and made her way toward the dark-skinned man, the alpha male. They greeted each other and went into one of the room by themselves. After they had left two men who were known as the fastest pickers grabbed the remaining women and took them to another room. From the living room one could hear the heated conversation that was unfolding inside the room. "I have told you before, no condom no sex." The same conversation was taking place in the other room. Then one could hear the voices of the men complaining, "I do not need a stinking condom. I'm a man, condoms are for stupid teenagers and not for a man like me." The faster pickers were next in line, followed by the older men and the younger men. The last in line were those pickers from South America; they were treated as second class Latinos, due to their indigenous culture.

#### I Have More Than You

The way one determines their social position is measured by what they own. The objects or passions are used to explain and demonstrate the amount of respect that should be given to a certain individual. Material things symbolize one's ability to adapt and become productive in a postindustrial society. The automobile represents the desire of every common worker, and the goal they would all like to reach. Those who owned cars, or better yet, those who bought an automobile while working during the season, became the manifestation of the goal of every migrant farm worker and their ability to be viewed as independent. It is their ability to assimilate to any given situation. The automobile became a symbol of that independence and the person no longer depended on the crew leader to take him or his family to purchase necessities, such as food and miscellaneous

things, nor the need to be driven to the worksite. Thus he and his family can leave the worksite at any desired time instead of having to wait for the work bus to pick them up. Merely owning a car gives them the honor title of being called a “*don*” (Mr.); the word *don* is used when addressing a person of higher social status from that of the common people—a sign of respect. The reason why such an honor is given to these individuals who own automobiles is that if a worker, who does not have means of transportation, ever needs to be transported to a particular area, he can ask the person with the automobile for assistance. Respect is automatically given to the owner of the automobile in return for the favor. The position, to some extent, becomes an addiction, because if the automobile ever breaks down, the owner will go to extremes to fix the automobile. Instead of asking for assistance from those in the camp, even a person who might be a master mechanic, the *don* will turn to those who also own an automobile for advice and assistance. In some cases, depending on the level of respect given to that particular person, the individual will not work until the vehicle is fixed nor will the person ever ride in the bus. Such an act could make him lose face. The worse thing than not owning an automobile is buying one that has broken down; it represents the person’s inability to make good decisions.

#### Respect for Privacy

Although the rooms are right next to each other, everybody respects each other’s privacy. Using any item, such as soap, food, or work tools, with out permission, is seen as an intrusion on that privacy. It might not be verbally expressed but through body language it is made clear that this is unwelcome. Respecting other’s personal items is very important, even after it is made known that if anybody needs anything it is okay to



take it without consent. This is more of a courtesy. For example, it is like offering someone at the dinner table a bite of the one's food. It is the courteous thing to do, but inside one is hoping that the person does not take it. This practice of offering is done at the worksite, especially at the end of the week when most of the money has been sent to the family in the native land or spent on material items. Those who bring lunch offer the little they have to those who have nothing, and they take it with shame and gratitude. They know that the person is practicing the proper etiquette found in their culture, so they take only a small piece of what they are offered. By offering and accepting food, social unity is affirmed. However, taking an offered item is done only in the presence of the person who is offering. Taking or using items that roommates said it was okay to use or take without asking, is not done unless the owner is there to say it is okay to use the item each time that is needed. It is understood that the individual offers out of common courtesy but the person does not take the item out of respect for privacy. Personal space is every important and everyone does what they can to maintain the feeling of individualism. The door to each bedroom is kept closed when there is no one in the room and only by invitation does anyone enter a room. Men could be gathered in a room watching a soccer game while the roommate could be sitting the in the living-room and will not enter without a verbal invitation. The only time the doors are open for everybody to see what treasures furnish the room is during the weekend, when roommates gather in a room to discuss whose automobile they will be using to go out, for groceries, laundry, or a night on the town.

### Hey Julio

“Hey Julio! Help me with this,” the foreman, a thin pale-skin figure said to one of the workers. Later in the day, the newcomer approached the worker, the foreman had addressed; he called the individual by the name that he had heard earlier. The other workers began to laugh as they heard that individual being addressed by particular name. “My name is not Julio,” the gentleman kindly addressed the new comer. “That is the way the farmer and others (black and white foremen) call us. You see, a while back, the farmer had three or five men whose names were Julio, so since we all look alike, according to him, he just calls all of us Julio,” the gentleman returned to his task. That evening, “*el patron*” (boss man), as many of the workers called the farmer, approached the newcomer and said to him, “You sure are tall for a Mexican, Julio!”

### The Boss man’s Store

The buses roared across the loose dirt and parked at the back of the store. The store is located in a four way stop—so the store is known as the “Four Corners Store.” Throughout the day, customers walk in and out of the privately-owned store. However, what was unique about the Four Corners Store were the people who make up the bulk of the store’s clientele. The majority of the customers are migrant farm workers. During the lunch they fill the parkway with loaded vans and buses with people who are willing to purchase from this expensive store. As one of the workers said, “We know that we pay maybe three times what the item might cost at Wal-Mart but we need to.” Due to the location of their work and housing, the nearest store that competes with the Four Corners Store was several miles away. Consequently, the items are in great demand, so the migrant workers are left with no option but to buy from the store. The clerks at the store

have learned a little Spanish in order to better communicate a sale with the customer. It is said that the store is owned by one of the farmers who has several camps within the area. Every payday, Friday, during the late hours of the day, a line of people of average height, dark skin, and straight hair are found curving along the exterior of the building. The crew leader hands his workers their pay for the week in the form of a check. After the crew leader has passed out the last of the checks, he informs the workers that if they want their checks cashed they must be in the bus by a specific time. The place where most of the buses take their workers is to the four-corner store. For those who do not have legal status in the United States, this is not a problem. Without proper identification, the individual is able to cash his/her check. The person walks into the store walks around looking at snacks and drinks, usually beer, and the person gathers what is at least ten dollars of merchandise. He places the items on the counter and hands over his/her check to the clerk. The clerk hands the person a pen to sign the back of the check, then the items are rung up and from the check the price of the items are deducted and the rest of the change is returned to the person. The majority of the checks that are cashed belong to the farmer who also owns the store.

#### The Crew leader

The crew leader is responsible for the activities that take place at work and on the campsite. The farmer hires him because of his ability to get the job done and control of the workers. If the residents of the area who are not migrants make a formal complaint to the farmer, it could lead to the termination of the crew leader and his crew depending how far into the season they are. If there is anything that threatens the crew leader's position of power, it is large families or second-generation immigrants (the individual is a

US citizen but not the parents). Large families tend to pick faster because each member is assign a specific task. For example, the mother and younger children pick and fill the bucket while the father and the older siblings carry the buckets to the trucks. This allows for the family to work efficiently and effectively, making them known to the farmer because of their productivity. The crew leader becomes uncomfortable when the farmer visits his workers because he fears it could lead to the creation of a network between the farmer and the family. Which in turn, this would mean the family no longer needs the assistance of the crew leader in the next season and works directly for the farmer.

Also families tend to complain more to the crew leader about the activities of the single men in the camp—fights, drunkenness, and prostitution. These complaints occur when the family consists mostly of females. For predominately, male families, however, these activities are seen as life lessons. For example, the father will give a sip of beer to his underage male child as the men gather around a vehicle to hear music from their native land—*corridos*. However, when the crew leader fails to deal with the situation then the head of the family, typically the father, complains to the farmer about the uncomfortable situation they find themselves in. The farmer resolves this by either demanding the crew leader deal with the situation immediately or by relocating the family to another camp owned by the same farmer. Thus, either resolution destroys the confidence that the farmer might have in the crew leader. There have been limited cases that have gone to this extreme but it was not due to the crew leader's ability to resolve the dilemma but more due to the inability of the complainees to communicate his concerns to the farmer after discussing them with the crew leader.

## Challenging the Crew leader

A teenager walked up to the farmer in a timid manner and began a conversation that eventually led to laughter. For a second, the workers stopped picking to see the strange event unfolding before their eyes. The farmer placed his heavy hand on the shoulder of the child and gently patted him. By this time the child had gained confidence in his conversation and found himself at ease in the presence of the farmer. From the distance a large figure emerges in a hasty manner. The workers quickly return to their activity of picking cucumbers at the quick stare they received from the crew leader as he made his way through the rows of workers. The crew leader immediately interrupted the conversation between the farmer and the boy. The young teenager excused himself from the presence of the two grownups and he returned to his work. The crew leader uses the inability of his workers to communicate directly with the farmer to his advantage for he serves as the individual in the middle who controls the communication channel. The lack and inability to communicate serves the interest of the crew leader. Since the workers do not speak English fluently, it forces them to address any problem or issues that they might have with the crew leader. However, the migrant farm worker community who seem to challenge this common practice are the second-generation immigrants. Second-generation immigrants are individuals who are American citizens but their parents are foreign born and migrated to the United States. These individuals tend to have a better mastery of the English language than the crew leader. They address the crew leader by his respected title of "*don*," but it is more of the common respect of the culture they find themselves in than an unquestionable respect they might have for the person. The crew

leader fears that the individual will interfere and interrupt the relation between himself and the farmer or that the individual will befriend himself with the foremen.

#### When the Weekend Comes

When the weekend came the crew leader left the camp in the hands of his right-hand man. The men gathered around the automobiles to listen to music from their native land, but hours after the laughter, yelling and swearing come from the once friendly circle of friends. This was followed by violence and blows to the face and the body of the opposing individuals. The roar of the crowd further encouraged the violent scene. After a few minutes of arm swinging wildly, the fight came to a complete halt and ended as swiftly as it had started. For the duration of the week, no one talks about the event. It is as though it had never happened, to the extent that both individuals involved in the altercation work side by side. When the weekend comes around again, the violent cycle is repeated. In most cases, it starts by someone bringing up an issue pertaining to the people involved in the prior altercation, so the individuals find themselves defending their machismo honor.

## CHAPTER V

## ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

The major goal of this thesis was to examine the living and working conditions of migrant farm workers. Through the use of participant observation, the researcher aimed to understand the dynamics of the lives of migrant farm workers. Recognition of the dynamics consists of observing the different social and working conditions of Camp A, B, and C. Furthermore, the researcher was able to relate these differences to social factors, such as assimilation and privacy, as well as the mattresses and how they tend to change from one camp to the other. Second, the researcher analyzed the type of work that migrant farm workers did and the learning process for those actual jobs. Then, the focus was placed on the issue of who the crew leader was and what his role was in the lives of migrant farm workers. Third, the ability to communicate and networking were important tools for migrant farm workers, for they allowed them to find work that was to their liking. Fourth, the researcher explained the social and economical challenges of the migrant farm working women and children, as well as the role of the alpha male. Finally, the study showed how these four factors contributed to the exploitation of migrant farm workers.

## Conditions and Mental States of those Living in Camps A, B, and C

There were noticeable differences among Camp A and Camps B/C, besides the physical state of the facilities. It was obvious that those who lived in Camp A benefited from having access to the resources of the town that Camps B and C lacked. However,

the researcher noticed that those in Camp A were prone to assimilate faster to the host society than those in the other two camps. They tend to play more recognizable sports such as softball, basketball, and volleyball in the city park located across the street from the camp, while those in the other two camps maintain the traditional sports of soccer to the extent of building an unofficial playground within the camp area. The reason why those in Camp A were more prone to assimilate could have been due to the pressure they felt from the host society when they were placed in their midst. It was stated that the people in the community were constantly watching every movement of those in the camp, for the workers were seen as outsiders to the locals. A similar observation was made in Heap's study that supports what I have observed, "They look funny at us and call us "spics." They seem to think we are some kind of foreigners who will be leaving soon (Heaps; 1968, p.71)." The fear is that although migrants may begin as seasonal commuters, over time they could develop social and economical ties that draw/pull them into permanent residency. After gaining familiarity with the migrant network during the first several trips, they found that the lack of legal documents was no longer a barrier to migrate again. Thus they were seen as most likely to stay in the host society and drain its resources which contributed to the fear of the host society. Therefore, they feel that they most assimilate in the interest of the general community.

However, the other two camps that could prolong the assimilation by the mere fact that they were neither in the view nor pressured by the host society to assimilate. However, it was obvious that although they were able to hinder assimilating into the host society, they were more in the control of the farmer/grower and crew leader and lacked the independent discussion making process, for those in Camp A, although showed signs



of assimilation to the culture of the host society, they however also showed more independence from the control of the grower and crew leader. The trade-off, for Camp A was assimilating into the culture of the general public in order to enjoy those freedoms of the discussion making process something that those in Camp B and C did not have. However, those in Camps B and C did prolong the assimilation process into the host society in order to keep their identity. The reflection of ones identity is not only found in the sports they play but also in their sleeping quarters.

Typically, the sleeping quarters signify a place of privacy where a person is able to express his individuality within the ideal environment or living space. However, Camps B and C hinder this ability of self expression, for even within their personal space, the individual is confined to the structure of the camp where he was unable to truly express himself out of fear that others might see his acts and make it publicly known to those in the camp. As Willard Heaps (1968; p.28) noticed when observing a work camp, "One thing that happens which I do not like is when a one bedroom house has to be shared with another family." However, if one family was noisy, the other family was unable to do anything about it but make the best of the situation, and accept that it was part of them living there.

When looking at the mattress situation, I found that the best mattresses were found in Camp A. The crew leader provided a plastic bed-lining from the company that could be removed if the person wished to wash it and the mattresses did not seem to be more than five years old. For a migrant farm worker camp, especially when people are constantly coming home dirty from a hard day's work, this is really good. However, the bad mattresses, which this researcher found, were from Camps C and B. Again, Camp B

seemed to represent the transformation, the middle of the road, from Camp A to Camp C by providing a plastic lining with minor rips in its mattresses. When Heaps addressed the issue of the conditions of the mattresses it serves as a good example as to those mattresses in Camp C, "The truck carried people and we rode on piles of mattress which we took into the houses where we stayed, because the first thing we found out was that the springs on the beds we could feel through the blankets which covered them (Heap, 1968; p.61)." Having decent sleeping quarters affected or contributed to the ability of the person in doing their work, however, the mattress not only affected the state of mind of a person but also his reason for wanting to stay out late—prolonging sleep on those poorly conditioned mattresses.

#### The Work of the Migrant:

Migrant farm workers are hired because they are unskilled workers who are open to performing the work that remains to be done in an advanced industrial society whose domestic workers are no longer willing to do. Consequently, they are sought after for their low level of skill and lack of familiarity of the host's language.

The reason why most of the workers are content at the nursery was due to the better housing the nursery provided and working conditions were better when compared to the work of picking cucumber and tobacco provided by Camp B and C. The contentment of those at the nursery was mostly due to the duration of time they have spent working for the same grower and the knowledge of the work. Most importantly it was the exposure to the American culture. These new changes comprised greater familiarity with American patterns and work habits but more importantly it was the ability to speak the English language and the ability to assimilate that opened the doors

for employment, which Massey and Kossoudji found in their studies. For example, some of the migrant farm workers at the nursery have stated to other co-workers that they were thinking about staying a little longer after the completion of the season. While others were shuttling back and forth, they will have much less specific capital, for U.S. wages depended predominantly on English speaking ability, time spent on the job, skill level and kinship with a legal migrant.

It is obvious that one's attempts to learn the social and economical ropes occur in order to survive in the environment the person is in, in this case, the world of a migrant farm worker. More importantly, the person does not want to be seen as an outsider. So when one is being taught how to handle the plant, pick the cucumber or tobacco, the person mimics the behavioral and working patterns of those in the camp. The person learns the new norms as means of survival within that particular environment. For I, the researcher, imitated the working habits of the experienced workers. In Tarde's Law of Imitation, he states that people imitate one another in proportion to the contact they have with one another. Therefore, imitating was an unpreventable behavioral occurrence when people lived and worked side by side. For example, I had imitated the behavioral patterns of those of whom I was observing. I was able to overcome the sickness of tobacco poison, because I was able to speak the language and comply with their norms.

The incident that occurred to me was that I became ill by what is known as tobacco poisoning which is not as uncommon as one might think. Crew leaders and farmers regularly risk the safety of workers by having them to work in dangerous or harsh conditions. What at first seemed as an uncommon exposure to pesticide became a common occurrence. For example, in a study conducted by Chad Richardson he found a

similar problem with migrants being exposed to pesticides when the crop duster sprayed too close to the workers, “The farmer said that we shouldn’t worry. It’s safe, he told us, just medicine for the crops. Even if someone went to the hospital, farmers would refuse to admit that their spraying contributed to it (Richardson, 1999; p.32).” Furthermore, adults were not the only ones exposed to pesticides. Where child labor laws are not enforced, children ten and above worked in the fields with their parents and were exposed to the same working conditions.

#### Crew leader:

The hiring of a crew leader served as a buffer between the farmer and the US immigration authorities because under the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, any farmer who knowingly hires undocumented workers is subject to the law. The crew leader was usually a legal immigrant whom the farmer hired the crew leader and not the migrant farm worker, thus the farmer was protected from legal sanctions even though his crop relied completely on undocumented workers. The crew leader was also a combination of father, banker, policeman, and boss for the people in his camp. There were those crew leaders who exploited their constituents, while there were those who have a loyal crew that would follow them due to their fair treatment of the workers.

The power of the crew leader was never challenged and workers freely give up some of their freedom and subdue themselves to unfair treatment because most of migrant farm workers have little money at the start of the trip. They find themselves owing money to the crew leader who recruited them, “ They are intensely emotional and given to moods of unhappiness, even disappear, for this reason they tend to be treated

like children by the crew leader (p.59),” this was the comment made by Jose Montero, in an interview conducted by William A. Heaps.

#### Networks:

A network is a set of recurring associations between groups of people linked by occupational, familial, cultural, or weak/strong ties. They are important in the life of a migrant because they simultaneously impose information and capital in the pursuit of personal gain. For example, weak ties link an individual to those within the same extended community while strong ties consist of a network built within the limited scope of the family. The purpose of networking is to provide the migrant farm worker with a means of finding social and economical opportunities. However, networking can also hinder the upward social mobility of a migrant farm worker. “They are under my control, and they know I can blackball them and they will never work again if they quit,” this was the comment made by a crew leader who was interviewed by William A. Heap.

However, a crew leader also saw the social network in a negative manner. The notion is that a crew leader needs to have control just like little children who need to be supervised. The minute that a crew leader demonstrates sympathy he loses the respect of his workers; therefore, the word goes around about the reputation of that particular crew leader as an easy mark and thus marking the end of any discipline. Crew leaders know that if they develop a reputation for bringing workers who hinder production to the farm, the farmer will select a different crew and crew leader for the next season. Most of the new workers, who came into the work camp, came with the recommendation of the crew leader’s hard-core veterans or regulars. Workers who did not utilize personal networks

may miss job opportunities that are only available through these personal social networks.

#### Women, Children, and Alpha Male:

The importance of family provided a support system that allowed for upward mobility and expedition for networking. The gender that seemed to be most affected by farm work were women, for they are the backbone/foundation of the families' stability. They find themselves thrown between the wishes of a modern society to assimilate and the traditional norms that tell them their place is in the service of the husband and her family. The migrant farm worker women still needed to comply with the traditional roles of caring for the family, such as washing the family clothes. For example, "We carry a big basin of clothes, which need to be washed regularly or else they get so dirty one can never get them clean." The man did not help the wife with duties, for he needed to maintain the traditional macho role. Women were better equipped to find some means of income either by prostitution, by cooking for the single men in the camp, or by selling home-made food, such as *elotes* (corn on the cob); this ability to profit contradicts the notion that migrants lack the knowledge and social resources to function efficiently as entrepreneurs. Some women have shown the ability to run a small, yet effective, business within the work camps. The major challenge that these women faced was taking their children with them to the worksites and placing the children at the end of the rows to keep an eye on them, since the crew leader do not like the idea of children staying at the camp.

A study was conducted by Carla Littlefield and Charles Stout focusing on illnesses based upon the person's gender. The study revealed that women had low spirits,

irritability, headaches, anger, allergies, eye trouble, bladder trouble, and anemia; therefore, suggesting that the migrant farm worker life-style places a large burden on these women. The uncertainty of what to expect contributes to stress buildup for migrant farm worker women. An example would be the women washing the clothes after a hard days work, for they must care for the children and do other duties while the husband drinks and rest. Although a mother might say that a child tends to get in the way it, would seem easier if he/she was not there but children do in times provide a positive outcome for her family.

Children tend to challenge the stability of the crew leader because they are more prone to assimilate in the host society than any other members in the camp. Although some crew leaders might argue that the reason why they do not want the children to stay at the camp is because it distracts a migrant farm worker from their duties in order to care for the child/children. The fact of the matter is that the more exposure a child has from the host society, the less he/she and their family will seem as outsiders, because the child learns the culture of the host society. As a result, migrant children show a more upward mobility when compared to their predecessors. Whether a child might have upward mobility economically when compared to their parents, it is nearly impossible for them to function as productive members of any society. They tend to suffer due to their experience as migrant farm workers from indifference, boredom, apathy, and most importantly, individual isolation. They abandon themselves to a private world that does not allow outsiders in or even their parents who want to understand why their children see themselves as outsiders. The child understands that the world is out of their control, which develops into a fatalistic view of the world around them. They learn that he/she

has no particular possession of their own—no place or thing they can call their own. But the crew leader does not care for the psychological instability that a child might develop later in life for he continues to exploit their family and he does not care what occurs in the camp as long as the farmer does not know.

For example, the crew leader and the farmer do not care if the consumption of alcohol makes the men in the camp violent; all the crew leader and farmer are concerned with is the work getting done. In Camps B and C fist fighting was viewed as the ability to win, at least spiritually and psychologically to make up for losing against an unseen opponent—life.

The alpha male is expected to keep control of those in the camp particularly those who do not pay attention to the rules that are posted. Throwing food around the camp area (not for hygienic purposes but more not to upset the farmer and crew leader), playing cards at night and gambling are some examples. Most importantly, the alpha male must make sure that those who are involved in fist fighting do not get severely injured. The crew leader trusts the alpha male because crew leaders appear to be more willing to place that person in a more responsible position with a corresponding higher wage but not all of the time.

#### Exploiting the Migrant Farm Worker:

As more people migrate, the crew leader has a greater pool to choose from. The crew leader has a weak loyalty to his workers, because the crew leader is allowed to pursue personal economic advantage by recruiting the most dependable workers available. Although a crew leader might exploit everyone who works for him, including the alpha male, those who are at the bottom of the social chain are exploited more, super-



exploitation. Super-exploitation means that there exists a stable difference in the rate of exploitation among different types of migrant farm workers.

When the weekend comes the people in the camps find themselves needing items such as gloves, food and other personal items. In all three camps, the migrant workers were indirectly forced to purchase some type of item from the farmer. Those in Camps B and C, the weekend consisted of a visit to the convenience store that was owned by the farmer. In other places there was usually a store in one of the buildings in the biggest camp, which charges everything to the migrant farm worker's ticket and was paid in full at the end of the season.

Surprisingly, the nursery exhibited similar activities. For example, when it rained, the migrant farm workers were required to continue working, even if it was raining heavily. The foremen would approach those who were soaking wet and he would ask the person if he or she needed a raincoat. The foremen were able to get one from the office for a fee of 50 dollars; if not, the person had to endure the harsh weather without protection. At no time did any of the foremen or crew leaders tell any of their workers that they needed to buy from the farmers, whether it be coats or goods from the store, but it was indirectly understood that they should because it was the common practice and no one wanted to be seen as a troublemaker. The crew leader was either in partnership with the farmer, who in turn gave him a percentage from the food concession, for the crew leader was tied to the interest of the grower.

The crew leader would be more likely to select a person for employment who is unable to speak the language of the host society in hopes of maintaining the exploitative infrastructure he has created. This would seem likely because the migrant farm workers

who speak English would communicate their dissatisfaction with a specific condition and would thus more easily job jump to improve employment conditions. Some see the exploitation of migrant farm workers as a necessary evil for it will be disastrous to turn over the land to ignorant uncultured peasants concerned with the declining of wages and social rewards that come with repressing a particular economical class.

However, migrant farm workers do not complain about the living conditions of the camps nor their working conditions because their expected earnings would be three times of what they would have earned at home and because something is better than nothing. Most importantly, usually some of them lack access to the civil and labor rights and social benefits, even though these rights are posted in the campsites; they are afraid to avail themselves of the rights they may enjoy for fear of being exposed to immigration authorities.

#### Conclusion:

In conclusion, the literature revealed several major issues of the working and living conditions of migrant farm workers and how they adjust to the demands of the work they do and how they adapt to the host society. Migrant farm workers are hired because they are unskilled workers who perform the work that remains to be done in an advanced industrial society whose domestic workers are no longer willing to do. They attempt to learn the social and economic ropes in order to make ends meet, but most importantly, they attempt to assimilate because they do not want to be seen as outsiders. The ability to communicate is essential to the world of the migrant farm worker, because it allows them to know where to migrate in the incoming season and to find suitable working and living conditions. Migrant farm workers are not the only ones who use and

understand the power of social networking. The crew leader can use the social network to his advantage.

The crew leader keeps track of the pay of his employees and monitors their behavior since he is held liable for the legal status of the people he hires, therefore removing any legal liability toward the farmer. The crew leader feels threatened when the farmer and his workers interact with one another because he fears it could lead to the creation of a network between the farmer and the family, which could remove him as crew leader. Thus, he sees his workers as intensely emotional and susceptible to moods of unhappiness. For this reason, the workers tend to be treated like children by the crew leader which is seen as a foundation for exploitation of his workers.

There are behavioral patterns that exist within the migrant farm worker culture that might seem deviant and socially unproductive to those who are not members of the same community. The behavior that is learned is mimicked by the next generation of migrant farm workers; which was demonstrated when the co-workers were explaining to the researcher while picking cucumbers, "You place the small in the bottom, in the middle you put the very big ones with leafs and everything, for the leafs keep it from falling into the gaps, and you finish it off by placing the small ones again. This will help you with the loaders because they will only see the small ones when you hand them the bucket and again when they dump it for the big ones are in the middle. "After that I was able to keep up with the other pickers."

The family tends to be the building block for upward mobility, and the family also determines who gets assimilated into the norms of the host society, the children. The gender that seems to be most affected by farm work is women. They are the

backbone/foundation of the families' stability, but they are trapped in a host society that promotes equality while having a traditional culture. An example would be the women washing clothes.

The living conditions and the culture tend to change with the location of the camp and the constant view of the general public. In Camps B and C, fist fighting was viewed as the ability to win at least spiritually and psychologically over a physical identity to make up for losing against an unseen opponent—life.

When the men gather around the campsite, they would listen to music from their native land in a friendly manner, but after hours of drinking, the yelling and swearing came from the once-friendly circle of friends. The violence was followed by blows to the face and mid-body of the opposing individuals, while the roar of the crowd further encouraged the violent scene. This act of violence illustrates their attitudes of how they view the world, for they are governed by a higher power and puppets of that higher power. Thus it contributes to their drinking and indifferent attitude toward violence.

In examining the treatment of migrant farm workers, exploitation was seen as the greatest challenge that affects a migrant farm worker. Exploitation is not an individual incident but a force that surrounds the migrant farm worker, for example, as more people migrate, the crew leader has a greater pool selection of manpower to select from, which allows him to pursue personal economical advantages by recruiting the most dependable workers available. There are different levels of exploitation for a migrant farm worker, but the crew leader might exploit everyone who works for him, including the alpha male. Those in the bottom of the social chain are exploited more which is termed as “super-exploitation.” The super-exploitation states that there exists a stable difference in the rate

of exploitation among different types of migrant farm workers. As in the example of the store owned by the boss where they must cash their checks for every payday, Fridays, during the late hours of the day, a line of middle height, dark-skinned, and straight haired people is found curving along the exterior of the building, waiting to cash checks.

The research has produced a significant finding, indicating that migrant farm workers still endure and encounter certain social disadvantages in the host society. A situation that was first encountered during the Dust Bowl Migration of "Okies" and "Arkies." During the mechanization of agriculture into the state of California were farmers who exploited the situation by providing sub-standard housing and lowering wages to those who migrated into the state. It is shocking to discover that after the modern change in the United States post-industrial society the level and form of exploitation is still occurring in the agriculture fields of this great land. For I found similar results to that of Heaps, the discomfoting feeling is that he did his study nearly twenty years before mine, yet some things are still the same.

By taking an in-depth look into the working and living conditions of migrant farm workers, it is seen that although laws and policies have been placed to protect migrant farmer workers, there has been limited and sometimes no enforcement of those policies; such lack of enforcement, through means of punishment for the wrong doers, allows migrant farm workers to be exploited by farmers and crew leaders. The creation of the crew leader provides a means of loopholes for exploitation of migrant farm workers. This research allows one to look and understand the culture of a migrant farm worker, a culture that is influenced by the conditions they find themselves in and their social environmental factors. By conducting this thesis, the researcher is hoping to stimulate

further research on the issue of migrant farm working; therefore, this thesis will be able to serve as a secondary source for those interested on such a topic. The hope is that by further understanding the isolated world of the migrant farm workers, a plan could be developed to eradicate exploitation of the migrant farm worker.

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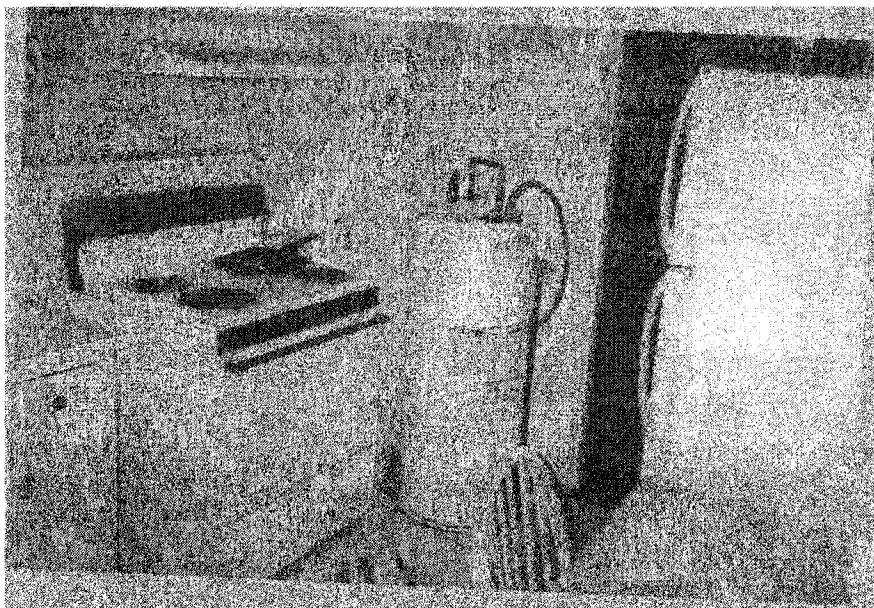
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APPENDIX A

PICTURE OF MIGRANT  
FARM WORKER  
WORKING AND LIVING  
CONDITIONS

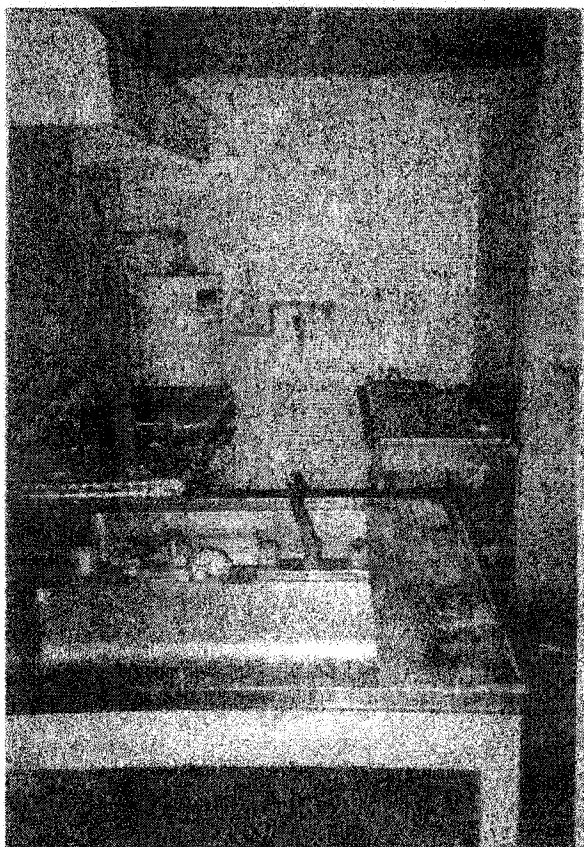
(FIGURE 1)



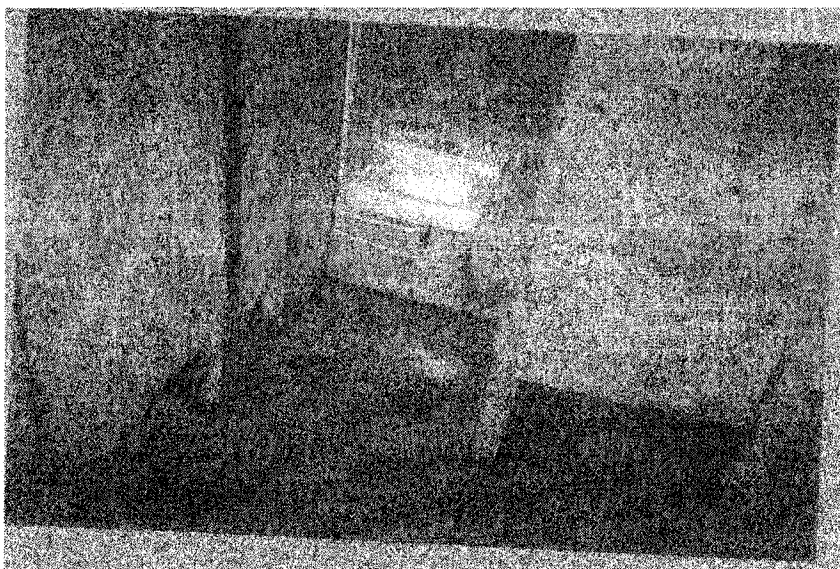
(FIGURE 2) **IMPORTANT:** This picture is not clear because the researcher took it from a discreet location.



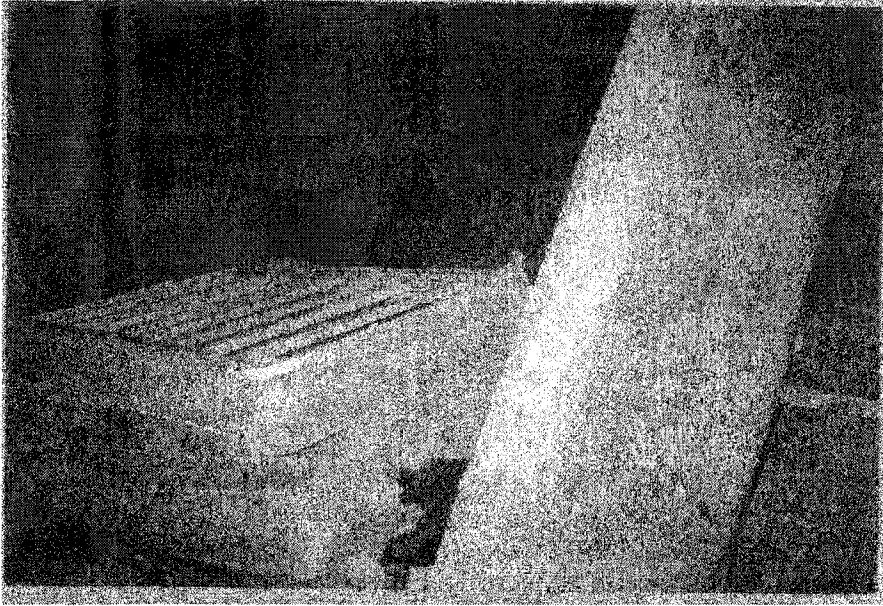
(FIGURE 3)



(FIGURE 4)



(FIGURE 5)



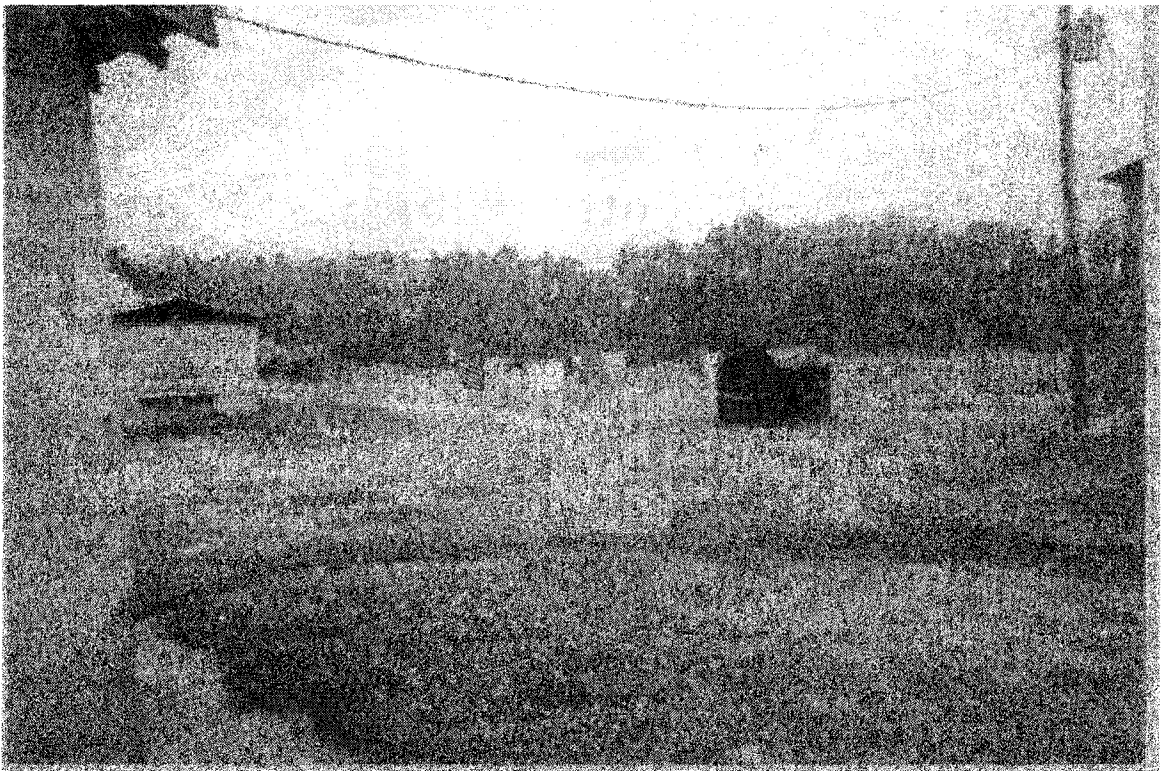
(FIGURE 6)



(FIGURE 7)



(FIGURE 8)



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