

SUMMARY OF REPORT FROM BALDEMAR VELASQUEZ AND ARTURO RODRIGUEZ December 1, 2004

In a report given to the media and religious supporters, Arturo Rodriguez, President of the United Farm Workers of America AFL-CIO, and Baldemar Velasquez, president of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee AFL-CIO, spoke to the significance of FLOC's recent victory with the North Carolina Growers Association (NCGA) and the Mt. Olive Pickle Co.

Both labor leaders heralded the agreement as a groundbreaking step for labor, not just in the South, but throughout the country. Rodriguez spoke about how in the past, guest worker programs such as the bracero program of the 40's, 50's and 60's were regarded as extremely abusive as workers were not protected and did not have rights or representation. Speaking to FLOC's recent accomplishment, he stated that "What was accomplished here really does create a whole new model. Now with this agreement in place we can turn towards it and say that this is a model for every other state where guest workers are utilized." Rodriguez highlighted the significance of the fact that this is the first time guest workers in any industry have organized.

Velasquez spoke to the successful implementation of the grievance procedure in the first months of the contract. According to Velasquez, "More than 1,000 workers have utilized the grievance procedure since September 16th. Differences and conflicts over wages and other matters have been resolved, the longest grievance being resolved in a matter of a couple of weeks. The growers have responded with fair mindedness and a true reconciliation has taken place." Velasquez credited the NCGA taking leadership in the ag industry by signing this agreement. He said that now the focus of everyone should be to protect this contract and continue to organize at non-H2A farms, including Dale Bone Farms, to bring other workers up to the standard established by the new victory. Both unions are looking towards the future and will continue the struggle to improve the lives of farm workers.

SUMMARY WRAP OF CONTRACT WINNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Farm Labor Organizing Committee had another intense and victorious summer. After winning neutrality with the North Carolina Growers Association over 30 volunteers from Michigan, California, Florida, St. Louis, and Ohio came to help support the card signing campaign. Thanks to those volunteers which included SAF interns, NFWM board members and staff, union organizers, and unemployed movement believers we signed over 3,800 union cards 2 1/2 months. We held negotiating committee meetings every Sunday and we were able to win the first union contract that covers guest workers in the country. FLOC now has the largest collective bargaining agreement in the south and it is the 2nd largest union local in the state.

Since Sept. 16 (Mexican Independence Day) over 1,500 workers have participated in union grievances. Workers won the right to go on their own transportation. **Many FLOC members won over \$5,000 in wages under union complaints.** Workers went back with the certainty of not being discriminated against and having their own union to defend their rights when the need arises. Jesus Martinez from Jimmy Hill camp was the first worker once the contract was signed to sit down with his grower and negotiate a system of time keeping for him and his fellow workers using the grievance procedure as a negotiation tool.

The same 79 workers in the negotiations committee took the role of continuing and beginning the structure of the union. The workers committee has agreed to divide the state into 8 regions and each region have its leadership committee each committee will have a chair, vice chair, secretary, treasurer, housing chair, negotiations chair, contract administration chair, and most importantly a leadership development/organizing chair.

In order to make all this happen we had to go into debt this summer and we are in desperate need of funds. FLOC members will be the people who will run the union. We as staff and supporters will be in charge of executing their orders and raising funds in order to grow. The first major order is to open the office in Mexico and to decrease the cost of transportation and visas.