

New Faces: Latinos in North Carolina

A curriculum-based media project about the Latino community's cultural & economic contributions to North Carolina.

UNIT 3

Latinos and the Economy

Module 3 Farmworkers

Lesson 1: The Agricultural Workforce (Page 2)

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Unit 3 Objectives:

1. Gain insight into North Carolina agriculture, a key segment of the state's economy
2. Evaluate the working conditions of the state agricultural workers.

Unit 3 Framing Questions:

1. What are the working conditions and rights of farmworkers in North Carolina?
2. Why is it important for consumers to learn about this important sector of North Carolina's workforce?

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Unit 3 / Module 3 / Lesson 1 The Agricultural Workforce

Objectives

1. Learners will gain an understanding of the conditions under which farmworkers labor.
2. Learners will analyze the factors that affect the work experience of farmworkers and will think about the ways in which they can support better working conditions for these laborers.

Framing Questions

1. What do we know about the conditions in which farmworkers often labor?
2. What are the responsibilities of all citizens to ensure fair and just working conditions for ourselves and for all workers?

Backgrounder

The following are some facts about agricultural workers in North Carolina and nationally:

- Agricultural labor includes planting, cultivating, harvesting and preparing crops for market or storage.
- Agriculture, including food, fiber and forestry, contributes over \$59 billion annually to North Carolina's economy and represents 22% of North Carolina's income.
- Major North Carolina crops requiring hand labor include tobacco, Christmas trees, sweet potatoes, cucumbers, apples, bell peppers, and other fruits and vegetables. Many farmworkers also work in greenhouses and nurseries.
- Migrant farmworkers travel from place to place to work in agriculture and move into temporary housing while working; seasonal farmworkers work primarily in agriculture, but live in one community year-round.
- Farmworkers are usually employed by farm owners or by "crew leaders," who serve as intermediaries between growers and workers.
- The H-2A program allows foreign "guest workers" to perform seasonal farm work under a temporary work visa designed for agricultural workers in the United States.
- North Carolina ranks sixth in the nation in the number of migrant farmworkers.
- Approximately 150,000 farmworkers and their dependents live in North Carolina each growing season, although this estimate is considered low.
- In the United States there are two million to three million farmworkers. Even though the overall number of farmworkers in North Carolina has decreased over the last 20 years, the number of migrant farmworkers has nearly doubled.
- Ninety-four percent of migrant farmworkers in North Carolina are native Spanish speakers.
- Nationally, most farmworkers are unaccompanied males whose families still live in their home countries.

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- The U.S. Department of Labor reports that 53% of farmworkers nationally are undocumented (working without legal authorization), 25% are U.S. citizens, and 21% are legal permanent residents.
- Each farmworker's labor contributes over \$12,000 in profit to North Carolina's economy annually.
- Nationally, farmworkers' average annual income is \$11,000; for a family it is approximately \$16,000. Farmworkers on the East Coast earn about 35% less than the national average.
- At 40¢ per bucket (5/8 bushel), a farmworker must pick and haul two tons of sweet potatoes to earn \$50.
- Few wage protections: Most farmworkers are exempt from minimum-wage laws, and all are exempt from overtime provisions, despite long workdays during peak harvest.
- Few benefits: Despite pervasive poverty, less than 1% of farmworkers collect general assistance welfare nationwide. Only 10% of farmworkers report having health insurance through an employer health plan. Fewer than 4 out of 10 workers interviewed said that they would receive unemployment benefits if out of work.
- Hunger: Nearly 5 out of 10 North Carolina farmworkers cannot afford enough food for themselves and their families.¹

While farmworkers continue to face difficult conditions, they have made some gains in the past several years in terms of pay and working conditions. After a long organizing campaign, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), a farmworkers union, successfully negotiated a three-way labor agreement with the Mt. Olive Pickle Company and the North Carolina Growers Association. On September 16, 2004, FLOC signed the agreement, "which covered 8,000 H-2A workers on 1,050 farms across North Carolina and a wide range of crops. Thousands of grievances were immediately processed, highlighting the many abuses experienced under the old system, and workers won wages and back pay which had been unjustly denied them. The North Carolina agreements were historic in several ways. For the first time since the days of slavery in the South and for the first time in the history of U.S. temporary "guest workers," agricultural workers had a direct voice in their own working conditions through their union."²

For more information on the organizing campaign and the work of FLOC, please see the handout that follows this lesson or visit <http://supportfloc.org/History.aspx>

Materials and Preparation Needed

1. TV and DVD player
2. Computer with Internet connection and projector with speakers

¹ All of these facts are from "Facts About North Carolina Farmworkers," published by the NC Farmworker Institute with funds from the Office of Rural Health and Community Care, NC Farmworker Health Program, 2007 <http://www.saf-unite.org/pdfs/SAF%20NC%20rev.pdf>

² From FLOC History <http://supportfloc.org/History.aspx>

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3. New Faces DVD Film Clip, "Farmworker Housing and Working Conditions." Joan Preiss, from the Triangle Friends of the United Farm Workers, Melinda Wiggins from Student Action with Farmworkers, and Sandy Smith-Nonini, a farm-labor researcher, discuss the substandard conditions and treatment farm workers still face. Regina Luginbuhl from the North Carolina Department of Labor, Everett Puckett, a North Carolina Department of Labor inspector, Frank Howell, a Wayne County farmer and various other farm workers discuss the issue of housing workers. The whole range of housing facilities is shown: from "gold-star" to substandard housing.
4. Additional video resource: WRAL documentary "Focal Point: Standards of Living," A documentary from this Raleigh news channel providing more up to date information on housing conditions for farmworkers.
<http://www.wral.com/news/local/documentaries/video/3209288/>
5. Copies of "Facts About North Carolina Farmworkers," published by the NC Farmworker Institute with funds from the Office of Rural Health and Community Care, NC Farmworker Health Program, 2007, <http://www.saf-unite.org/pdfs/SAF%20NC%20rev.pdf>
6. Summary of Farm Labor Organizing Committee's work in North Carolina. (Handout follows this lesson. Information also available from <http://supportfloc.org/History.aspx>)

Lesson Outline

Film Clip and Discussion

1. Show the clip, "Farmworker Housing and Working Conditions" and the more recent WRAL documentary, "Focal Point: Standards of Living" (Only available on the WRAL website: <http://www.wral.com/news/local/documentaries/video/3209288/>).
2. Direct a discussion and check for comprehension:
 - According to the farmworker at the beginning of the clip, why do Latinos come to North Carolina to work?
 - According to Ms. Preiss, Ms. Wiggins, Ms. Smith-Nonini and the farmworkers, what are some of the conditions under which farm workers labor?
 - What is an exploitable, low-wage workforce? Why might some farm workers be considered an exploitable workforce?
 - Some farmers, like those featured in both documentaries, provide very good living conditions for their farmers. Why do you think Mr. Howell and other farmers take pride in creating good living conditions for their workers? Why might other farmers not provide good living conditions for the laborers who work for them? What should be done in cases in which farmworkers are being exploited?
 - How might the experiences of farmworkers be similar or different from the experiences of Latino workers in other sectors of the economy? What advantages might Latino workers in other sectors have over agricultural workers?

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Further Exploring the Facts

1. Ask learners to pair up.
2. Distribute to each pair a copy of “Facts About North Carolina Farmworkers” and the Summary of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee’s Working in North Carolina and ask them to read the material together.
3. Ask learners to compare the information that they learned from the film clips to that provided in the handout.
4. Ask each pair of learners to identify the five facts about farmworkers from the film or from the handouts that most surprised them or that made the most impact on them.
5. Each pair should write a summary sharing these facts and explaining why the information impacted them.
6. Ask each pair to think about who else in their communities needs to know this information and why.

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Summary of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee's Work in North Carolina³

"After consolidating its gains in the Midwest, FLOC began organizing in North Carolina, the second major pickle-producing region in the U.S. The South has had a strong anti-union "right-to-work" tradition, which reflects attitudes towards workers since the days of slavery and tenant farmers. Also, North Carolina had developed a strong reliance on imported H-2A "guest workers." These workers experience corruption in the recruitment process in Mexico and after they arrive in the U.S. have no say about for whom they work or the type of work they do. While on the job, they suffer intimidation and retaliation if they complain of poor treatment or conditions, including being blacklisted from future employment.

In 1997, FLOC approached Mt. Olive Pickle Company, the country's second largest pickle producer, and invited the company to enter into multi-party contracts like those in the Midwest. The response was the same initial argument as Campbell Soup had given, that Mt. Olive was not responsible for farmworkers and only worked with its growers. The company refused to negotiate.

FLOC began an organizing drive on farms producing Mt. Olive pickles, and many workers signed union-authorization cards for FLOC to represent them.

The following year, FLOC called for a national boycott against Mt. Olive Pickle Co. FLOC had already begun developing support networks among faith, labor, student, and civic groups to press for a direct voice for farmworkers in their own conditions. In addition to efforts in North Carolina, FLOC expanded the boycott efforts throughout the South, Midwest, and other regions. Hundreds of religious, labor, student, and community groups across the country endorsed the boycott, including the Catholic bishops of Raleigh, Toledo, Cincinnati and other dioceses, the United Church of Christ, the United Methodist Church, the National Council of Churches, and the AFL-CIO.

A number of demonstrations and marches increased public pressure on Mt. Olive. Attention was also directed at grocery chains, resulting in Kroger stores in northwest Ohio and Farmer Jack stores in Ohio and Michigan pulling Mt. Olive products from their shelves.

In 2004, FLOC began talks with Mt. Olive and the North Carolina Growers Association. On September 16, FLOC signed a three-way labor agreement, which covered 8,000 H-2A workers on 1,050 farms across North Carolina and a wide range of crops. Thousands of grievances were immediately processed, indicating the many abuses experienced under the old system, and workers won wages and back pay which had been unjustly denied them.

³ From <http://supportfloc.org/History.aspx>

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The North Carolina agreements were historic in several ways. For the first time since the days of slavery in the South and for the first time in the history of U.S. temporary "guest workers", agricultural workers had a direct voice in their own working conditions through their union.

Following this victory, FLOC opened an office in Monterrey, México, to help the new members with processing their work visas and to train workers about their new rights under the union contract.

In 2006, FLOC members voted to expand labor rights to Southern tobacco harvesters by launching a campaign against tobacco giant RJ Reynolds. In September 2007, FLOC President Baldemar Velásquez asked to meet with Susan Ivey, the CEO of Reynolds American Inc., to discuss the conditions of field workers producing its products. Reynolds replied that it saw no reason to meet with FLOC. FLOC has since begun a public campaign to pressure Reynolds American to take responsibility for the human rights violations that occur in the farms that produce their raw product.”

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Unit 3 / Module 3 / Lesson 2 Fair Housing for Farmworkers

Objective

Learners will be able to communicate their understanding of the varying housing conditions experienced by migrant farmworkers and, after investigating current conditions, will create a list of housing standards that they believe should be mandatory.

Framing Questions

1. What do we need to know about the living and working conditions of farmworkers?
2. What role can consumers of the food grown and harvested by farmworkers play in supporting fights for better living and working conditions for farmworkers?

Backgrounder

The 1935 National Labor Relations Act specifically excluded migrant workers from legislative protection, and migrant workers continue to be excluded from many protections. They are a workforce that is vulnerable to abuses.

While farmworkers continue to face difficult conditions, they have made some gains in terms of pay and working conditions in the past several years. After a long organizing campaign the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, a farmworkers union, successfully negotiated a three-way labor agreement with Mt. Olive Pickle Co. and the North Carolina Growers Association. On September 16, 2004, FLOC signed the agreement, "which covered 8,000 H-2A workers on 1,050 farms across North Carolina and a wide range of crops. Thousands of grievances were immediately processed, indicating the many abuses experienced under the old system, and workers won wages and back pay which had been unjustly denied them. The North Carolina agreements were historic in several ways. For the first time since the days of slavery in the South and for the first time in the history of U.S. temporary 'guest workers', agricultural workers had a direct voice in their own working conditions through their union."⁴

Despite this progress, continued effort is required to maintain this agreement and to protect the human rights of undocumented workers and others who are not part of the union.

Housing Standards Set By the Migrant Housing Act of North Carolina.

The 1989 Migrant Housing Act of North Carolina requires that any establishment consisting of one or more migrant workers register with the North Carolina Department of Labor and have the premises inspected prior to occupancy. The legislation requires 100 square feet per person for living, sleeping, and cooking and one standard operable stove with at least one burner per five people.

^{4 4} From <http://supportfloc.org/History.aspx>

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Materials and Preparation Needed

1. Computer with Internet connection and projector with speakers
2. WRAL documentary, "Focal Point: Standards of Living" (available only on the WRAL website, <http://www.wral.com/news/local/documentaries/video/3209288/>)
3. PDF slideshow, "Substandard Housing Conditions Persist for North Carolina Farmworkers," summarizing a study of farmworker housing conditions in North Carolina conducted in 2007 and 2008. From the Wake Forest University School of Medicine. Available at <http://www.ncchca.org/widgets/download.aspx?file=%2Ffiles%2FEast+Coast+Migrant+Stream+Forum%2FEast+Coast+09%2FDangerousHousingConditionsAndHealthRisks.pdf>
4. Masking tape
5. Tape measure

Lesson Outline

Slideshow:

1. Ask learners to think about the video clip "Farmworker Housing and Working Conditions" and the WRAL piece, "Focal Point: Standards of Living." If the online documentary has not been viewed previously watch it with students.
2. Introduce the housing standards set by the Migrant Housing Act of North Carolina.
3. As a group, view the PDF slideshow, "Substandard Housing Conditions Persist for North Carolina Farmworkers."
4. Review the findings of the study. Compare these findings to the information shared in the "Farmworker Housing and Working Conditions" clip and the WRAL video. Ask students to look at the clips and estimate when they were filmed. (The film from which this clip was taken was released in 2001, and the WRAL video is from 2005.) Ask learners to think about what seems to have changed or not changed in the lives of farmworkers between the time these videos were shot and when this study was conducted.

Imagining the Experience of Living in Migrant Housing

The objective of this activity is for learners to gain some insight into the experience of the small living spaces in which many migrant farmworkers often must live.

1. Engage the class in measuring a space that is 10 ft. x 10 ft. (100 sq. ft.) Tape it off.

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2. Allow a pair of students to measure out a bed. Tape this off. A standard single bed measures 39" x 75".
3. Add more furniture to the space; e.g. two classroom chairs and desk to represent any personal items or additional furniture that a farmworker might have.
4. Ask learners to step into the space and imagine sharing it with other adults.
5. Given images they have seen in the film clips and in the slideshow presentation, ask the students to express how they might feel if they had to live in a similar situation.

Discussion of Housing Standards

1. Lead a discussion of the various housing facilities seen in the film.
2. Are the housing standards always followed by farm owners?
3. There are migrant camps that earn a "gold star," and there are camps which are considered substandard. According to a N.C. Department of Labor housing inspector, not all camps are inspected. As a group, create a document, listing minimum housing standards that you think a farm owner should provide for resident farm workers.

Extension Activity

1. Ask learners to think about how their list compares with recommendations made in the study and by groups in North Carolina working for farmworker rights. Ask students to reflect on the following questions (in writing or as a group).
 - Are there farms in your community that house migrant workers?
 - How could you go about researching the conditions of the housing that these farms provide? *Note: Students may contact any of the following organizations for information about farmworkers in N.C. and the conditions that farmworkers face: North Carolina Growers Association, Student Action with Farmworkers, Farm Labor Organizing Committee.*
 - What could you do to raise awareness in your community about the living and working conditions that farmworkers sometimes face?
 - How could you help support those farm owners who are providing healthy and fair living and working conditions for farmworkers?

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Unit 3 / Module 3 / Lesson 3

The H-2A “Guestworker” Program in North Carolina

Objective

Learners will become familiar with the history of the H-2A Visa program and will be able to describe the pros and cons of this program for farmworkers and farm owners.

Framing Questions

1. How can farmworkers legally come to the United States to work?
2. What are the pros and cons of this guest worker system for farmworkers and for the state?

Backgrounder

“The H-2A temporary foreign agricultural worker program allows agricultural employers to hire workers from other countries on temporary work permits to fill agricultural jobs that last ten months or less. To bring in H-2A guestworkers, employers must first show that they have tried and are unable to find U.S. workers to meet their labor needs. Although the H-2A program includes some basic requirements to protect U.S. workers from negative effects on their wages and working conditions, as well as to protect foreign workers from exploitation, it has been criticized for failing to protect vulnerable workers.”⁵

“There have been a number of exposés over the years about the H-2A program and the failure of the U.S. government to prevent and adequately punish violations of the law and regulations by the employers. These reports include the award-winning series, “Desperate Harvest,” by Leah Beth Ward in the *Charlotte Observer* (October 31-November 2, 1999); the Human Rights Watch Report, “Unfair Advantage” (2001), specifically the chapter on the North Carolina H-2A system; Barry Yeoman’s “Silence in the Fields,” *Mother Jones* (Jan.-Feb. 2001); and Michael Blanding’s “Invisible Harvest,” *Boston Magazine* (October 2002). See the handout, “Resources on the H-2A Agricultural Guestworker Program,” for a complete list.”⁶

In February 2010 the federal Department of Labor announced new regulations for the H-2A agricultural guestworker program that would largely undo changes to the program made in 2009. According to Farmworker Justice, “the (2009) regulations changes by the previous administration slashed wage rates and worker protections that had been the standard for over 20 years...” Farmworker Justice goes on to say that “Farmworker advocates have long criticized the H-2A guestworker program for its lax labor protections for both U.S. farmworkers and guestworkers. The Bush Administration changes lowered minimum required wage rates and reduced government oversight despite the program’s

⁵ “Pre-2009 H-2A Guestworker Program,” from the Farmworker Justice website, http://www.farmworkerjustice.org/Immigration_Labor/H-2A.htm

⁶ Available from Farmworker Justice, http://www.farmworkerjustice.org/Immigration_Labor/H2abDocs/H-2A%20Resources.pdf

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obligation to ensure that employers hire U.S. workers before receiving permission to hire foreign guestworkers.”⁷

The new 2010 regulations restore wage rates, restore the guarantee that U.S. workers will be hired before foreign workers, and maintain some positive changes made in the 2009 rule change. For details about the new H-2A rules see:

http://www.farmworkerjustice.org/Immigration_Labor/h2anews.htm

While this lesson outlines some of the problems with the H2A programs, one important development in this story should be made clear. “On September 16, The Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) signed a three-way labor agreement, which covered 8,000 H2A workers on 1,050 farms across North Carolina and a wide range of crops. Thousands of grievances were immediately processed, indicating the many abuses experienced under the old system, and workers won wages and back pay which had been unjustly denied them. Following this victory, FLOC opened an office in Monterrey, Mexico, to help the new members with the processing of their work visas and to train workers about their new rights under the union contract.”⁸

Materials and Preparation Needed

1. TV and DVD player
2. Computer with Internet access and projector with speakers
3. *New Faces* DVD Film Clip “Guestworkers.” In this clip, the film’s narrator and Stan Eury, from the North Carolina Grower’s Association, give background information about the H-2A Guestworker program. A former H-2A farm worker discusses his experience in the program. Then, Alice Tejada, a lawyer with Legal Services of North Carolina who represents H-2A workers, and Sandy Smith-Nonini, a farm labor researcher, discuss the problems with the program.
4. *Supplemental Film Clip: Speaking Truth to Power.* Available on YouTube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FkoXtnOfUKE&feature=player_embedded
5. Summary of Farm Labor Organizing Committee’s work in North Carolina. (Handout follows this lesson. Information also available from <http://supportfloc.org/History.aspx>)
6. For further information on the H-2A program, visit the Farmworker Justice website, www.farmworkerjustice.org, the North Carolina Grower’s Association website <http://www.ncgrowers.org/h2a.php>, and the website of the Department of Homeland Security, http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/releases/pr_1202308216365.shtm

⁷ “H-2A Guestworker Program,” from the Farmworker Justice website, http://www.farmworkerjustice.org/Immigration_Labor/h2anews.htm

⁸ From the History of FLOC <http://supportfloc.org/History.aspx>

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7. *Additional Resource:* For instructors who would like to have a guest speaker come to their class or organization to talk about farmworker issues, we suggest contacting the N.C. Farmworkers Institute Speakers Bureau, <http://www.saf-unite.org/ncfarmworkers/NewFiles/Speakers%20Bureau%202007-2008.pdf>

Lesson Outline

Viewing the Film Clips

1. Introduce and show the clip. Share with learners that this clip provides a historical perspective on the H2A program. Ask learners to listen closely to what the H-2A program is about, according to four points of view:
 - Stan Eury Director of the North Carolina Grower's Association
 - A former H-2A farm worker
 - Alice Tejada, at the time of the documentary a lawyer with Legal Services of North Carolina who represents H-2A Guestworkers
 - Sandy Smith-Nonini, a farm labor researcher
2. Share information from the backgrounder section from this lesson, emphasizing the changes in the rights and working conditions of H2A workers in North Carolina after the agreement between FLOC, the NC Grower's Association and Mt Olive Pickle Company. It is important that learners critically examine the content of this clip, thinking about when it was produced and comparing information in the clip to the most up to date information on H2A laborers in North Carolina provided in the backgrounder section.
3. Watch the supplemental video *Speaking Truth to Power*, which outlines the history of FLOC and its founder, Baldemar Velasquez. Ask learners to pay careful attention to the section at the end of the film about FLOC's organizing in N.C. and their victory in securing an agreement with the Grower's Association and Mt. Olive Pickles.
4. Have a discussion of the films to establish an understanding of the basics of the H-2A Guestworker program and of the benefits that labor organizing has brought to workers that are part of the H2A program. You may need to provide additional information from the backgrounder section above. Use the questions and answers below to help you facilitate the discussion.
 - What is the H-2A Guestworker program?
 - When and why was the H-2A Guestworker program enacted?
 - Why is it beneficial for foreign workers to come work in the U.S. under the H-2A program?
 - What are some of the benefits of this program for farmworkers?
 - What have been some of the disadvantages for the worker? According to the farmworker in the clip, what are some of the problems with the H-2A Guestworker program?
 - How has the agreement between FLOC and the NC grower's Association changed the working conditions and lives of the H2A farmworkers for the better?

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- In the most recent rounds of debates in Congress and in states about immigration reform, many have suggested that we should expand a guestworker program to other sectors of the economy. What lessons might the H-2A Visa program teach us about the pros and cons of such programs?

Exploring More Information About Farmworkers

In the past several years, rule changes have been made by the Bush and Obama administrations to the H-2A program (see the backgrounder section above for more detail), and there are constantly new developments in efforts to grow our nation's food and protect farmworkers' rights. Researching these new developments can be an important exercise for learners:

1. Ask learners to further research information about the labor conditions, rights, and contributions of farmworkers. Students can explore the following websites:
 - The National Farm Worker Ministry <http://www.nfwm.org/>
 - Student Action With Farmworkers <http://www.saf-unite.org>
 - United Farm Workers <http://www.ufw.org/>
 - Farm Labor Organizing Committee <http://www.floc.com>
 - Farmworker Justice <http://www.farmworkerjustice.org>
 - North Carolina Growers Association <http://www.ncgrowers.org>
 - Department of Homeland Security: http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/releases/pr_1202308216365.shtm
2. As a final assessment, learners can summarize their findings about the lives of farmworkers and the systems of which they and we consumers are part in a PowerPoint presentation, essay, drawing, or other means of creative expression.

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Summary of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee's Work in North Carolina⁹

"After consolidating its gains in the Midwest, FLOC began organizing in North Carolina, the second major pickle-producing region in the U.S. The South has had a strong anti-union "right-to-work" tradition, which reflects attitudes towards workers since the days of slavery and tenant farmers. Also, North Carolina had developed a strong reliance on imported H-2A "guest workers." These workers experience corruption in the recruitment process in Mexico and after they arrive in the U.S. have no say about for whom they work or the type of work they do. While on the job, they suffer intimidation and retaliation if they complain of poor treatment or conditions, including being blacklisted from future employment.

In 1997, FLOC approached Mt. Olive Pickle Company, the country's second largest pickle producer, and invited the company to enter into multi-party contracts like those in the Midwest. The response was the same initial argument as Campbell Soup had given, that Mt. Olive was not responsible for farmworkers and only worked with its growers. The company refused to negotiate.

FLOC began an organizing drive on farms producing Mt. Olive pickles, and many workers signed union-authorization cards for FLOC to represent them.

The following year, FLOC called for a national boycott against Mt. Olive Pickle Co. FLOC had already begun developing support networks among faith, labor, student, and civic groups to press for a direct voice for farmworkers in their own conditions. In addition to efforts in North Carolina, FLOC expanded the boycott efforts throughout the South, Midwest, and other regions. Hundreds of religious, labor, student, and community groups across the country endorsed the boycott, including the Catholic bishops of Raleigh, Toledo, Cincinnati and other dioceses, the United Church of Christ, the United Methodist Church, the National Council of Churches, and the AFL-CIO.

A number of demonstrations and marches increased public pressure on Mt. Olive. Attention was also directed at grocery chains, resulting in Kroger stores in northwest Ohio and Farmer Jack stores in Ohio and Michigan pulling Mt. Olive products from their shelves.

In 2004, FLOC began talks with Mt. Olive and the North Carolina Growers Association. On September 16, FLOC signed a three-way labor agreement, which covered 8,000 H-2A workers on 1,050 farms across North Carolina and a wide range of crops. Thousands of grievances were immediately processed, indicating the many abuses experienced under the old system, and workers won wages and back pay which had been unjustly denied them.

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Following this victory, FLOC opened an office in Monterrey, México, to help the new members with processing their work visas and to train workers about their new rights under the union contract.

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