

## WASHINGTON REPORT

### Congressman Edwin D. Eshleman

16th District—Pennsylvania



Some of you probably recall that I am the ranking Republican on the Agricultural Labor Subcommittee. That subcommittee deals with legislation pertaining to farm workers and their problems

Over the past several months, we have listened to a great deal of testimony about farm labor. What has struck me is the tendency to become more concerned with the emotional nature of the problems rather than the realities which must be faced if any meaningful legislation is to be developed

In other words, the chairman of this committee has tended to concentrate on the emotionally-charged issue of migratory labor even though migrancy is a dying

feature in the agricultural picture. Just last year, for instance, the number of migrant workers dropped by 24 per cent.

Therefore, any legislative decisions that are reached based upon the plight of migrant laborers will not deal with the problems faced by the majority of farm workers in this country. We are likely to end up with another example of Congress complicating a situation by responding to the wrong symptoms.

The real problems facing farm workers, where there are large concentrations of them such as in the Midwest and South, are low pay, poor working conditions, and, most important, the steady decline of available employment in agriculture. These are things

on which Congress should center its interest.

There is little doubt but what much of the agricultural labor force deserves higher wages and improved living standards.

However, that does not imply necessarily the need for unionization of farm workers. There may be some advantage to unions where large corporate farms are involved, but the small farmer should not be forced to deal with organized labor to get a work crew.

The best solution may be to establish realistic government standards for farm pay and living standards which will improve the lot of the agricultural laborer without forcing him to turn to a union.

Any standards which are created, however, must recognize some other facts of life in the agricultural labor market.

First, we must be aware that our agricultural products have to compete with those grown in foreign countries where labor prices are far lower.

For instance, Mexico, where farm workers make 25 cents an hour, shipped more than one billion pounds of fruits and vegetables to this country last year, an increase of 350 million pounds since 1964. An increasing amount of this Mexican production is financed by U.S. capital driven across the border by farm union agitation in California and Texas where the bulk of our vegetables and fruits are grown.

We also must recognize that new machines have been developed to harvest grapes, tomatoes, cherries, sugar beets, asparagus, carrots, parsley and other crops that formerly were harvested by hand. That means that thousands of jobs are no longer available on farms at any wage.

Therefore, some attention must be directed toward retraining farm workers for other types of employment when labor-saving technology eliminates their jobs. Otherwise, the decrease in farm employment may end up increasing our welfare rolls, and this country cannot afford that price for the unwillingness of Congress to face the real facts of the farm work problem.

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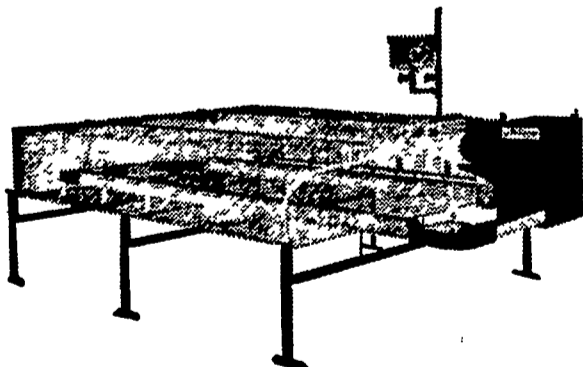
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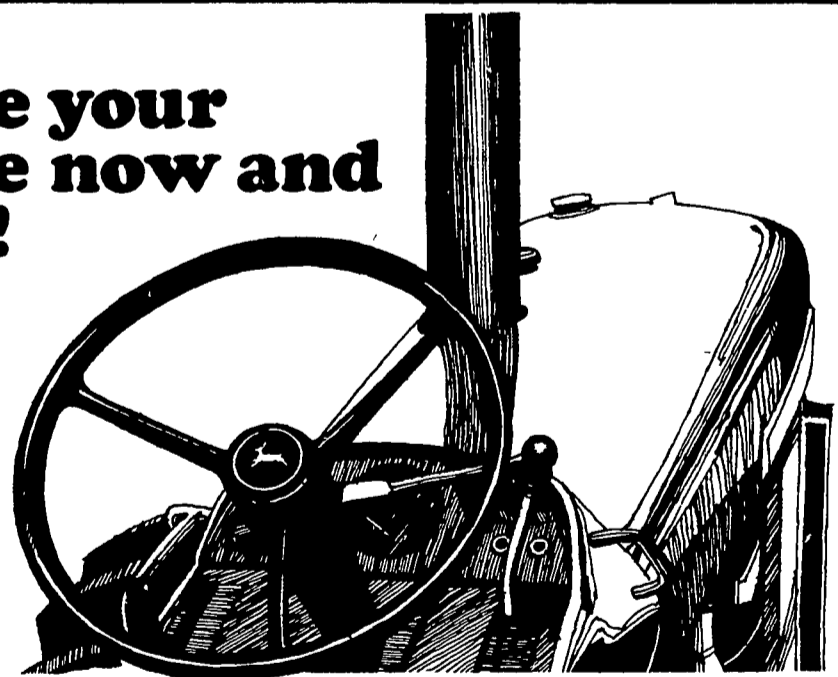
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