

Farm Employment Up

For the first time in 20 years, farm employment in some areas, including Pennsylvania, is increasing, according to an economist with the College of Agriculture at The Pennsylvania State University. "At least for the time being, hired farm employment is increasing as individual farms grow larger and the farm work force becomes more industrialized," declared Dr. James S. Holt in addressing members of the State Horticultural Association at their 116th annual meeting in Gettysburg.

It appears, he said, that the effects of mechanization

and consolidation have run their course on farm employment. He is associate professor of agricultural economics at Penn State.

Hired farm employment declined steadily for over 20 years in Pennsylvania and reached a low level of about 16,000 workers in 1969, Dr. Holt reported. It remained stable at about that level through 1972, he added, and then increased by almost a third to 21,000 workers in 1974. Peak seasonal hired employment increased from a low of 26,000 workers in 1971 to 32,000 in 1974.

Relatively high levels of unemployment are predicted well into 1976, it was pointed

out. This means, he said, the the supply of agricultural workers will be increased by non-farm people - at least during the next two growing seasons.

Increased unemployment, however, will not slow down appreciably the rise in farm wage rates, Dr. Holt affirmed. The average hourly farm wage rate rose 12 cents in 1974 to \$2.11 an hour. A similar rise is likely in 1975, he predicted, due in part to the effects of the increased agricultural minimum wage.

From the standpoint of employment regulations, he said there is a strong trend toward eliminating special exemptions for agriculture. Arguments that removal of special exemptions for farm employment would eliminate some workers from the labor market are likely to fall on deaf ears during periods of high general employment, he noted.

Organizing efforts of workers will continue, Dr. Holt indicated. There is at least the possibility of agricultural labor relations legislation being passed by Congress in the next 2 or 3 years, he added.

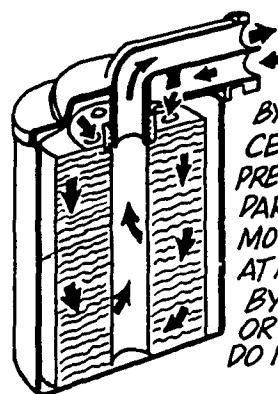
"Such legislation is bound

to restrict the overall supply of workers and increase wage rates. At the same time, it may have some advantages to employers in regularizing the farm labor market while improving the social status of farm work," he stated.

With increasing numbers of workers coming from non-farm and even non-rural

areas, recruitment and training programs are ways suggested. Even for unskilled work, training may be essential for workers without previous farm experience.

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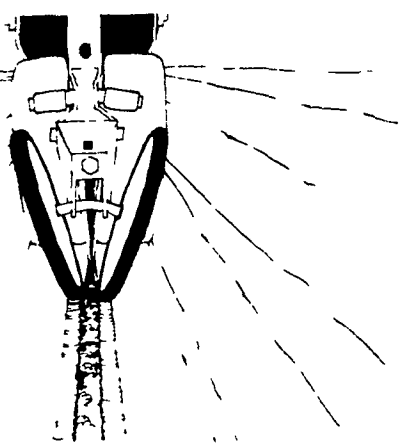
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