

DAY by DAY on the FARM by RICHARD ORR

Migrant Workers Busy in Area

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EVERY SUMMER Cook county's truck farms undergo an "invasion" from the Rio Grande valley in Texas. A small army of native born workers of Mexican descent makes the annual 1,600 mile trek to plant, cultivate, and harvest the county's commercial garden crops. Many migrants bring their entire families to work in the fields.

The movement begins in spring when several hundred workers arrive in southern Illinois to help with the May harvest of strawberries. When that crop has been picked most of these move on to the Chicago area and other parts of northern Illinois to plant tomatoes, onions, carrots, radishes, sweet corn, sugar beets, peas, beans, and other truck crops.

Begin Picking Apple

Those workers are followed by others who pause in southern Illinois to pick apples, harvest of which is starting now, and by more who will arrive there next month for the main harvest of apples and peaches.

Cook county leads all others in the state in truck crop production. Roughly 7,000 acres in the Chicago area are devoted to tomatoes alone. About half as many acres are planted to onions and onion sets — providing three quar-

ters of the onion sets for the entire United States.

Right now more than 1,200 migrant workers are employed on Cook county farms. They are picking strawberries, weeding crops, digging and cleaning onion sets, and harvesting radishes. Peak employment of migrants in this area will occur early in August when more than 4,000 will be on hand for the tomato harvest which will continue until frost.

"The people who follow the crops are pretty good workers," commented Richard B. Calhoun, chief of the farm placement division of the Illinois employment service, a part of the state department of labor.

Plan Months Ahead

Calhoun explained that the state employment service begins as early as February each year scheduling the number of migrant workers that will be needed for the forthcoming season by truck farmers and food processing companies.

Minimum wage for migrant farm workers in the Chicago area is 70 cents an hour, said Calhoun. However, during the harvest season they are paid on the basis of how much they harvest.

Calhoun estimated that the average migrant farm worker in this area makes up to \$15 a day and that the fastest workers can make up to \$20 daily. When the crop season is over in this area the migrants return south to pick cotton.