

Plan to Help Migrants Settle Permanently

BY JOAN PINKERTON

Some 500 migrant agricultural workers will abandon the fields for the factories this year if efforts of the Illinois Migrant council [I. M. C.] are successful.

Job training, special education, low-cost housing, and subsidized health care are part of the council's plan to entice migrant workers and their families to settle permanently.

The migrant council, 1307 Wabash av., is a not-for-profit corporation established in 1964 thru the cooperative efforts of the Illinois Council of Churches and the Catholic Council on Working Life.

Budget Approved

The council, which is funded thru the office of economic opportunity, last week received approval of a \$1,041,790 budget which will finance a 6-week summer program consisting of child day care centers; adult evening classes; a 20 to 24-week winter job training program for adult males; and low-cost housing. These programs are aimed at equipping the migrant agricultural worker with urban skills in anticipation of the time when automation will replace farm laborers, said the Rev. Robert Reicher, treasurer of the I. M. C.

The migrant council's summer programs for adults and children will be in operation next month in Libertyville, Princeville, Illinois City, De Kalb, and Chicago Heights. The state department of public instruction, with the aid of \$92,000 allocated to Illinois under the federal elementary and secondary education act, expects to open child day care centers in four additional downstate municipalities, the Rev. Reicher said. If this is done, the migrant council will open adult classes in those areas, he said.

Classes in October

Adult literacy job training classes will begin in October in five nearby municipalities — Libertyville, Mundelein, Chicago Heights, Joliet, and Elgin — and in at least seven downstate municipalities, the Rev. Reicher said. Men attend classes five or six hours a day

and receive a stipend between \$45 and \$65 a week depending on family size.

Upon completion of the winter program, a trainee can either get a job such as a welder or auto mechanic, or enroll in a one-year course to train for more specialized jobs in the building trades or public service, the Rev. Reicher said. Graduates of either program are placed thru the Illinois State Employment service.

Some \$125,000 of the council's total budget has been designated for housing, the Rev. Reicher said. "We hope to provide 120 families with assistance to build, remodel, or rehabilitate homes," the Rev. Reicher said.

"Housing is one of the severest problems for migrant workers," he said. "As they make the transition from rural to urban life, they often continue living in housing that was adequate for the summer but is inadequate for the winter."

"There is a great lack of low-cost housing in suburban areas," the Rev. Reicher said. "Migrants tend to settle here not only because it is where they lived as agricultural workers, but because suburban industrial expansion provides a ready source of jobs," he said.

Little Public Housing

With the exception of Joliet and Chicago Heights, there is very little public housing available in the suburbs, the Rev. Reicher said. The Cook county housing authority has funds for this purpose, but municipalities have the right to veto projects and are generally reluctant to have public housing, he said.

Subsidized health care for migrants and their families will be provided for the first time this year if federal funds are approved, as it is anticipated they will be, said Miss Frances Sugrue, migrant health representative for the United States public health service. Four community groups, two of them in Cook county, have applied to the public health service for grants totaling \$50,000, she said. The money would provide the kind of care a patient normally would receive in a visit to a doctor's office, she said.

The state does provide medical aid for poor people but migrants are excluded because of a residency requirement, she said. The state's care for migrants currently is limited to pregnant women and children thru the age of 19. The federal funds would extend this care to nonpregnant women and adult males.

An agricultural migrant worker is a person who moves from state to state to supplement the available supply of farm laborers. Illinois attracts some 10,000 such migrants a year, the Rev. Reicher said. Most of them come from Texas and are Americans of Mexican descent, altho quite a few are southern Negroes, he said. Many migrant workers bring their families and every year many voluntarily drop out of the migrant stream. The migrant council represents the first organized attempt to recruit migrants for urban jobs, the Rev. Reicher said.

Migrant agricultural workers must be paid the federal minimum wage of one dollar an hour, the Rev. Reicher said. In the Chicago area, they are paid about \$1.50 an hour, he said. During the busy season—July and August—a worker can make \$20 a day by working dawn to dusk, he said. After job training, we try to see that they are placed in unionized industries and in jobs paying \$2.50 an hour, he said.