

DAY by DAY on the FARM *By* RICHARD ORR

Need Pickers of Strawberries

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WANT A JOB PICKING strawberries? The harvest of southern Illinois' million dollar strawberry crop is under way, and growers are short of pickers.

"Everybody is short of help," said Charles Copple of Centralia, who operates the S. C. Garrison company, a produce brokerage firm, and grows 25 acres of strawberries himself. "The only thing that is saving us so far is cool weather. If it gets hot and the berries ripen faster, we'll have to abandon some fields."

Illinois' strawberry crop is grown chiefly in Washington, Marion, and Jefferson counties. To harvest it, growers depend largely on migrant workers, chiefly Negroes from Louisiana and other southern states, along with Texans of Mexican ancestry. Copple estimated the average annual work force has been reduced about 25 to 30 per cent this season.

"That's enough to get us in trouble," he added.

Fear Michigan Shortage

The shortage of strawberry pickers in southern Illinois presages a shortage in southwest Michigan when the harvest begins there early next month. When the harvest is over in southern Illinois, the migrants usually move on to Michigan.

Copple said strawberry pickers are paid on a piece work basis at the rate of 8 cents a quart.

About two thirds of the migrants who come to the area bring their families, and the wives and some of the older

children also work in the fields. Copple said it isn't unusual for some families to earn \$50 to \$70 a day.

The shortage of migrant farm workers is widespread this year in areas of the United States which grow fruits and vegetables. Millions of dollars' worth of crops have spoiled or have been destroyed in California and Florida for lack of harvesters.

Law Allowed to Lapse

One cause of the shortage is the expiration last Dec. 31 of the law under which Mexicans, West Indians, and other foreigners were permitted to enter the United States to work on farms.

An important factor in the labor shortage there, Copple

said, is the new federal farm labor contractor registration act, which became effective last Jan. 1. Under the act, all crew leaders who supply 10 or more migrant workers for interstate farm or warehousing work must register and be fingerprinted at their state employment offices.

They also must show proof that they have adequate motor vehicle insurance, and must have their vehicles inspected annually by an interstate commerce commission inspector or approved garage. Apparently many crew leaders, on whom growers depend heavily to recruit field help, either don't understand the regulations, don't want to bother with them, or can't afford the insurance, so they don't show up with the help.