

THE MYTH OF THE "FAMILY FARM" AGRIBUSINESS: CALIFORNIA'S

Agriculture is California's largest and richest industry, producing over \$5 billion gross income in 1969. The trend is toward bigger and richer farms. Only 7% of all farm owners possess 79% of the land and employ 75% of all farm labor. In Kern County, where Delano is located, the average farm has 2,279 acres (U. S. average is 351 acres) and is valued at \$590,000, according to the 1964 U. S. Census of Agriculture. The trend towards fewer and larger farms has increased rapidly since then.

Corporate conglomerates like Tenneco's Kern County Land Co. (348,026 acres in California alone) J.G. Boswell Co. (70,000 acres), Gumarra Fruit Corp (12,000 acres) and Bank of America's front-organization, the Agri - Business Investment Corporation dominate the table grape industry. The table grape industry centers around 30 grower-packer-shippers who handle

85% of all production.

California - Arizona growers have a virtual market monopoly over table grape production, raising 98% of the U.S. supply; imports account for less than 1% of total sales. From 1956 to 1966, table grape yields, production and profits increased steadily, all signs of a dynamic industry which can afford to pay living wages.

Many growers are absentee landlords with holdings throughout the Southwest, who are expanding steadily as federally subsidized

irrigation water becomes available. Meanwhile, the vast agribusiness lobby perpetuates the myth of the "family farmer" to maintain taxpayer-paid privileges, such as free labor recruitment through the Farm Labor Service, state university research and technical assistance, and over \$4 billion annually in federal farm subsidies. In 1967, J.G. Boswell, who is a grape grower and sits on the Board of Directors of Safeway Stores, topped the hand-out list with \$4 million. Seven Delano table grape growers receive



ABOVE: Headquarters for S. A. Camp Co., a "family-farm" of Shafter, Kern Co., California. Camp owns a string of cotton gins, cotton compresses, cotton seed oil plants, a pump company, a fertilizer and insecticide company, a farm machinery and equipment company, the Circle Petroleum Agency, and 16,000 acres of cotton, 40,000 acres of potatoes, and over 231,000 acres of grazing and cattle land. Mr. Camp collected \$517,285 for not growing cotton on some of that land last year.

As a hobby, Camp built a harness racing stable of fine thoroughbred horses. Camp's income from horse racing in 1958 alone was \$486,908.

In March, 1969, Camp bought out a major portion of the old DiGiorgio Ranch, an estimated 8,000 acres for over \$8,000,000. This new acreage included pines, asparagus, peanuts, and other crops, but was mostly in grapes. Camp has refused elections or to recognize the union.

RIGHT: Bank of America, grape grower, financier of grape growers, controller of grape growers.

RICHEST INDUSTRY

over \$645,000 worth of this "welfare for the rich" every year, mostly for agreeing not to grow cotton that year.

While other industries pay living wages and unemployment insurance, it is the taxpayer who bears the

burden of rural poverty, agribusiness' main by-product, by paying for federal and state health and meager subsistence to impoverished farm workers. Welfare and charity are not the answers for America's agricultural working poor. Growers

can afford to pay decent wages. The growers have been able to avoid this social responsibility in the past only by successfully defeating all attempts by farm workers to form a union and bargain collectively.



ABOVE: Cadillacs lined up at Bianco Fruit Co. Packing shed in Delano.



WHAT ABOUT THE SMALL FARMER?

As a man who works the land, the small farmer is also the victim of agribusiness power. The low wages paid by the corporate farms with whom small farmers must compete depress the value of the small farmers' labors. The welfare and survival of small producers is not dependent on keeping farm laborers poor, but on organizing -- as workers are doing -- to bargain for a fair price for their products in the market place.

However, it must be remembered that even the small farmer is not in the same desperate economic position as the impoverished farm worker. The 1964 Census of Agriculture reports that 90% of all California farms of 10 acres or less in size are valued at \$10,000 or more. Thus even the small farmer has savings and credit at the bank, and an established place in the community. As California Migrant Ministry Director, the Reverend Wayne C. Hartmire, reminds us, "Humanly speaking, the plight of the workers still demands priority attention."

LEFT: Tulare County Cop calmly watches as children work as strike-breakers. Rural Police protect the growers' society from the law.

