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## Register of the Farm Worker Organizing Collections, 1948-1996

### Collection number: MSS 027

Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research

Los Angeles, California

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#### Descriptive Summary

**Title:** Farm Worker Organizing Collections,

**Date (inclusive):** 1948-1996

**Collection number:** MSS 027

**Creator:** Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research

**Extent:** 4 legal boxes

1 1/3rd linear feet

**Repository:** Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research

Los Angeles, CA 90044

**Abstract:** This is a collection of reports, writings, correspondence, union documents, fliers and clippings from individuals and organizations involved in the struggle for equitable wages and decent living conditions for farm workers in the United States during the 20th century.

**Language:** English

#### Provenance

Sam Kushner donated significant portions of the collections. Other materials do not have accession documentation. The library staff believes these materials were donated by activists who worked on farm worker campaigns.

#### Access

The collection is available for research only at the Library's facility in Los Angeles. The Library is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. Researchers are encouraged to call or email the Library indicating the nature of their research query prior to making a visit.

#### Publication Rights

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### **Preferred Citation**

[Identification of item], Farm Worker Organizing Collections, Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research, Los Angeles, California.

### **Organizational History**

Farm workers (as opposed to farmers) have been necessary to agricultural development in the territory that is now the United States almost from the first contact between Europeans and the peoples of the Western Hemisphere. As early as the seventeenth century, there was an insufficient supply of stable and cheap farm labor available domestically to fulfill the needs of mass (plantation) agriculture. The need was filled from populations outside of North America, beginning with the use of prisoners as indentured workers in the British colonies, followed by the importation of Africans for slave labor. Commercial farming created a subjugated underclass of farm workers that continues to the present day. In nineteenth century California, farm labor was imported from China, Japan and South Asia. Later, it became more expedient to use laborers who came from Mexico to work in the booming industrial agricultural farms of the valleys (San Joaquin, Salinas and Imperial) of California.

The pay of these farm workers has historically been low and living conditions sub-standard. The work is seasonal, creating a migrant population of workers not tied to any particular community. Health care has often been virtually non-existent, let alone insured, and education for farm worker children often substandard when available. The children themselves have often been farm workers as well.

Many organizations, governmental, religious, social activist, have been concerned with improving the circumstances of farm workers. In addition to legislation and providing social services, these groups have seen union organizing as the most effective way for farm workers to achieve lasting improvement in working and living situations.

The abysmal conditions experienced by farm workers, every bit as bad as those of urban factory workers, would seem to be fertile ground for union organizing. Attempts to organize farm workers were made in the 1930s by the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union, in the 1940s by the National Farm Workers Union, and in the 1950s by the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO. These efforts were hindered by competition between unions, racism, and perceived competition between domestic and foreign workers. In addition, the sheer poverty of the workers made it difficult for them to financially support a union, and ignorance of the specific needs of migrant agricultural workers by union organizers more familiar with urban industrial workers reduced the effectiveness of organizing. There were also cultural misunderstandings between groups of workers and workers and organizers. The lack of a stable community was another exacerbating issue.

The enormous influence of commercial growers with politicians at both local and national levels in preventing better working conditions for farm workers cannot be overstated. Unionizing activity was particularly abhorred. Beginning in the 1940s, growers in California and the southwest successfully lobbied for the establishment of the bracero program that brought in farm workers from Mexico to work during harvests and returned them to Mexico when their labor was no longer needed. The terms of the bracero program provided labor at extremely low cost and no requirements (in practice) to provide even the most basic housing, health services and education for children. This system effectively made it impossible for unions to recruit membership and demand fair wages and working conditions.

Organization was finally achieved in the 1960s in California with the formation of the United Farm Workers National Union (UFW) under the leadership of Cesar Chavez. The early successes of the UFW were achieved by gathering sufficient support from the buying public to effectively boycott grapes and lettuce of California growers. These boycotts brought growers to the bargaining table. Throughout the 1970s the UFW made substantial gains in recruiting membership and obtaining better wages and housing for farm workers. The union worked to reduce the incidence of child labor in the fields, provide education to those children, and lobbied for legislation to control the use of pesticides in proximity to workers. Coupled with the sympathetic administration of California Governor Jerry Brown, the Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB) was established to address the grievances of farm workers, unionized and non-unionized. The UFW, like unions in general, began to lose ground in the 1980s. A change in gubernatorial administration in California turned the ALRB into a hindrance rather than help in continuing efforts to organize farm workers. Most importantly, divisions within the UFW leadership caused that union to be less effective. The growers returned to dealing with labor contractors and recruiting labor from Mexico rather than deal with unions. After the death of Cesar Chavez in 1993, the UFW regrouped and refocused its activities. While many of the gains for farm workers in the 1970s were reduced or lost by the 1990s, the union itself remained a continuing force in the fight for farm worker rights.

The plight of farm workers remains almost as dire at the beginning of the 21st century as it was in the 19th. The same underlying causes for this situation remain as problems for farm workers in their struggle to achieve equitable wages and decent living conditions. The words of

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Father James L. Vizzard, S.J. are unfortunately truer in the globalized economy of the 21st century than when he said them in the 1964, "They (the growers) need to be made to understand in what century and in what kind of economy and society they are living and operating. They must be forced to realize that to exploit the poverty of other nations in order to beat down and crush the poor of our own country is the grossest kind of immorality."

### **Scope and Content**

The Farm Worker Organizing Collections are comprised of government, academic, foundation, and social service reports, testimony given to the U.S. Congress, correspondence and writings, fliers and newsletters, union documents, and clippings from newspapers and journals that relate to the conditions of farm workers in the United States and the efforts to organize this work force. The documentation comes from a variety of organizations including religious, governmental, social activist, and union groups. The documents give a sense of the situation for farm workers throughout the 20th century and the many kinds of people, organizations and activities that contributed to the eventual establishment of the first successful farm worker union, the United Farm Workers National Union, AFL-CIO.

### **Arrangement**

The collection is divided into 7 series: 1. National Sharecroppers Fund, 2. Emergency Committee to Aid Farm Workers, 3. Howard Richards, 4. Farm Workers Association, 5. United Farm Workers National Union, 6. Farm Worker Support Groups, 7. Other Documentation.

### **Separated Material**

The following items were removed and added to the Periodicals Collection.

*Farm Labor: Equal Rights for Agricultural Workers*, Berkeley, CA: Citizens for Farm Labor, [13 issues], 1963-1967

*Valley Labor Citizen*, [3 issues], 1965-1966

*El Malcriado*, nos: 3-5, 8, 13, 15, 19, 32, 4/26/67, 8/23/82, 10/4/82

*Ahora*, v5 n2

**Title:** Sam Kushner Papers

**Physical Description:** 5 cartons

**Title:** *Farm Labor: Equal Rights for Agricultural Workers*, Berkeley, CA: Citizens for Farm Labor, Periodicals Collection .

**Title:** *El Malcriado*, Periodicals Collection.

**Title:** *Long Road to Delano*, Kushner, Sam. New York: International Publishers,

**Date:** 1975

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**Title:** *Factories in the Field*, McWilliams, Carey. Boston: Little, Brown and Company,

**Date:** 1939

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**Title:** *Mexican American Labor, 1790-1990*, Gomez-Quinones, Juan. Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press,

**Date:** 1994

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Series 1. **National Sharecroppers Fund (NSF), 1948-1962**

**Physical Description:** 1 folder

**Scope and Content Note**

This series is composed of four "condition of the farm workers" reports to the board of the National Sharecroppers Fund, an organization founded in the 1930s to aid farm workers and tenant farmers, particularly in the southern United States.

Box-folder 1/1      **National Sharecroppers Fund, 1948, 1955, 1961, 1962**

Series 2. Emergency Committee to Aid Farm Workers, 1963-1965

**Physical Description:** 6 folders

**Scope and Content Note**

This series includes congressional testimony, reports, proposals, planning documents, internal memoranda, forms, and other administrative documents for the projects developed by the Emergency Committee to Aid Farm Workers. This organization was dedicated to helping domestic farm workers find employment in the Santa Barbara/Ventura region at equitable wages with humane working conditions. Some projects were developed to foster skills development during times between the seasonal farm work.

Box-folder 1/2	<b>Administration, 1964-1965, n.d.</b>
Box-folder 1/3	<b>Testimony, 1963</b>
Box-folder 1/4-1/7	<b>Projects</b>
Box-folder 1/4	<b>Operation Harvest Hands, 1965, n.d.</b>
Box-folder 1/5	<b>Operation Buenaventura, 1965, n.d.</b>
Box-folder 1/6	<b>Farm Workers Opportunity, 1965, n.d.</b>
Box-folder 1/7	<b>New Hope for Farm Workers, 1965, n.d.</b>

Series 3. **Howard Richards, 1955-1965**

**Physical Description:** 8 folders

**Scope and Content Note**

This series includes personal correspondence and writings of Howard Richards, who as a young attorney and philosophy graduate student in the mid 1960s, provided legal services to Cesar Chavez and the Farm Workers Association. At this time, Richards was also the personal assistant to Robert Hutchins at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara. There are a few of his files with documents relating to farm worker issues and organizing work. These include a paper given at the Center by Ernesto Galarza, who headed the National Farm Labor Union in California and AWOC reports on the conditions of farm workers.

Box-folder 1/8-1/10 **Personal papers, [3 folders]**

Box-folder 1/8 **General correspondence, 1964-1965, n.d.**

Box-folder 1/9 **Cesar Chavez correspondence, [8 items] 1964-1965**

Box-folder 1/10 **Writings, 1964, n.d.**

Box-folder 1/11-1/15 **Other entity - documents, [5 folders]**

Box-folder 1/11 **Various individuals and organizations - writings, 1955-1956, 1965, n.d.**

Box-folder 1/12 **Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), AFL-CIO - reports and testimony, 1959**

Box-folder 1/13 **Farm worker unions - documents, 1965, n.d.**

Box-folder 1/14 **State of California - report and laws, 1961, 1963**

Box-folder 1/15 **California Counties, various - ordinances, 1964, n.d.**

Series 4. **Farm Workers Association (FWA), 1965?, 1966**

**Physical Description:** 1 folder

**Scope and Content Note**

This series includes two documents of the Farm Workers Association, the precursor organization to the United Farm Workers National Union. One is an agreement of cooperation between the FWA and AWOC. The other, *Basta!*, is a photo essay published by the FWA documenting the plight of farm workers and their struggle for better working and living conditions.

Box-folder 2/1      **Farm Workers Association (FWA), 1965?, 1966**

Series 5. United Farm Workers National Union - AFL-CIO (UFW), 1959-1988

**Physical Description:** 12 folders

**Scope and Content Note**

This series includes materials from the constitutional conventions of the United Farm Workers National Union, AFL-CIO, including the proposed constitution from the first convention. There is a small amount of correspondence and copies of arbitration agreements and a complaint filed by the UFW against the Teamsters Union. The largest portion of the material is literature published by the UFW to rally public support for their organizing, particularly through the boycott of grapes and lettuce.

Box-folder 2/2-2/6	<b>Conventions, [5 folders]</b>
Box-folder 2/2	<b>1st Constitutional Convention, reports, rules, and call to convention, 1973</b>
Box-folder 2/3	<b>1st Constitutional Convention, Proposed Constitution, 1973</b>
Box-folder 2/4	<b>1st Political Endorsement Convention, 1976</b>
Box-folder 2/5	<b>3rd Constitutional Convention, resolutions, 1977</b>
Box-folder 2/6	<b>4th Constitutional Convention, program, 1979</b>
Box-folder 2/7	<b>Legal documents - copies, 1975, n.d.</b>
Box-folder 2/8	<b>Correspondence [4 items], 1970, 1972-1974</b>
Box-folder 2/9	<b>Publications, 1967, 1973, 1987</b>
Box-folder 2/10	<b>Newsletters - actions, initiatives, boycotts, 1967-1971, 1974-1975, 1978, n.d.</b>
Box-folder 2/11	<b>'Fact Sheets' and legal analysis, 1968, 1970, 1973-1974, 1976</b>
Box-folder 2/12	<b>Circular letters, 1965-1967, 1970-1971, 1973-1979, 1988, n.d.</b>
Box-folder 2/13	<b>Fliers and reprints, 1959-1960, 1966, 1972-1973, 1975-1980, 1983, 1986, n.d.</b>

Series 6. **Farm Worker Support Groups, 1964-1979**

**Physical Description:** 8 folders

**Scope and Content Note**

This series primarily includes literature published to involve the public at large in the farm workers struggle to attain better working and living conditions. The material displays the wide range of organizations that were involved in boycotts, strikes and other actions to support the farm workers. The list of organizations includes:

- Box-folder 3/1-3/5 **Religious organizations, [5 folders]**
- Box-folder 3/1-3/2 **Circular letters, [2 folders]**
- Box-folder 3/1 **California Migrant Ministry, 1967-1970, 1972, and  
National Farm Worker Ministry, 1971-1973, 1975-1977, 1979**
- Box-folder 3/2 **Other religious organizations, 1972-1976, 1978, n.d.**
- Box-folder 3/3 **Reports (studies), 1967-1968**
- Box-folder 3/4 **Pamphlet and testimony, 1972, n.d.**
- Box-folder 3/5 **"The Small Farmer in Mexico," Center for Ethics and Social Policy, 1979**
- Box-folder 3/6-3/8 **Secular organizations and individuals, [3 folders]**
- Box-folder 3/6 **Mixed documents (correspondence, circular letters, editorials, press releases), 1965, 1968-1969, 1972,  
1975-1976, n.d.**
- Box-folder 3/7 **Reports and pamphlet, 1964-1965, 1967, 1973, 1976-1977, n.d.**
- Box-folder 3/8 **Fliers, 1964, 1969-1971, 1973-1975, n.d.**

Series 7. Other documentation, 1959-1996

**Physical Description:** 14 folders

**Scope and Content Note**

This series includes reports, publications, reprints and clippings relating to farm worker organizing activities and issues. Of note is the testimony given to the U.S. Congress by Henry Anderson in 1961. Anderson organized Citizens for Farm Labor as a support organization for farm workers. He did extensive study and publication on the conditions of farm workers in California in the 1950s and 1960s and worked for the improvement of their lives.

- Box-folder 3/9-3/11 **Reports, [3 folders]**
- Box-folder 3/9 **State of California, 1965, 1981, 1985**
- Box-folder 3/10 **University of California, 1956, 1965**
- Box-folder 3/11 **United States Department of Labor, 1961**
- Box-folder 3/12 **Testimony, 1961**
- Box-folder 3/13 **Teamsters Union, 1970?s, 1974**
- Box-folder 3/14 **CAL-LAW, 1985**
- Box-folder 4/1-4/2 **Photocopies and reprints, [2 folders]**
- Box-folder 4/1 **1959-1960, 1966, 1972-1973, 1975-1980, 1983, 1986, n.d.**
- Box-folder 4/2 **Undocumented migrants, 1976-1977**
- Box-folder 4/3 **Press release and reprints - "Fight in the Fields," 1996**
- Box-folder 4/4-4/8 **Clippings, [5 folders]**
- Box-folder 4/4 **1960, 1963-1966, 1968-1969**
- Box-folder 4/5 **1970-1975**
- Box-folder 4/6 **1976-1979**
- Box-folder 4/7 **1980-1982, 1984-1988, 1990, 1993**
- Box-folder 4/8 **Nds.**