



The OREGON STORY



The Oregon Story: Agricultural Workers

Education Program

Susan Booth Larson, Author

Introduction

The story of agricultural workers in Oregon is one of the people who have lived in the land we call Oregon for over 8,000 years, their relationship with the natural resources they found here, and the capacity of the land. It's a story that highlights change initiated with European settlement of the area, the enthusiasm of invention and innovation, a vast palette of awe-inspiring resources, courage and optimism of heart and spirit, and lives carved out of the land. Yet it's also a story of displacement of native peoples, reduction and elimination of native plants and animals, and non-sustainable harvest of natural resources. It's a colorful story, and a complicated one. The Oregon story of agricultural workers is a story about our use of a resource that has changed as we have used it, of immigration to Oregon, and of the choices that face all Oregonians who live and work here.

Oregonians are known for their connection with the land. Post-European settlement in Oregon has been defined largely by our relationship with the region's abundant natural resources. These resources have provided the base of the state's economy. Yet increasingly, Oregon is being defined by its urban populations, and employment in the resource-based industries that have supported Oregonians since statehood is giving way to service, manufacturing, and professional positions.

Oregonians of all ages -- both those who've lived here for generations and those newly arrived -- are acknowledging that changes have occurred in the resource base, and are accepting that the face of Oregon as we now know it, the land and the people, has been altered hugely by the use of that resource base.

Our task now is to consider how we use and manage our natural resources in the next century. Our decision will affect Oregon economically, culturally, and environmentally. This is our challenge and our opportunity, and will form the legacy we leave to future generations.

Educational Objectives

The Oregon Public Broadcasting video program, *The Oregon Story: Agricultural Workers*, contributes to understanding the land we know as Oregon today and the history of our involvement with it. It also raises important issues about the role of development in Oregon. Suggestions¹ provided in this guide demonstrate ways to support and supplement the exploration of this history in the context of Oregon Department of Education Content Standards and Benchmarks. Suggestions include activities, explorations, field excursions, and further adventures in reading and viewing.

The Oregon Story: Agricultural Workers has five major objectives, which are to promote:

- Understanding about how agricultural workers, especially those of Hispanic descent, have contributed to Oregon's history and development;
- Awareness about the traditions and way of life of agricultural workers who live and work in Oregon;
- A perspective about change that is occurring in living and working conditions for agricultural workers in Oregon;
- Critical thinking about the care, use, and management of Oregon's natural resources;
- Incentive to celebrate the history, celebrate the present, and appreciate the possibilities of the future of Oregon.

¹ Many of the suggestions support Oregon Department of Education CIM and CAM benchmarks and performance standards.

Preview It

Preview the program for specific information and concepts relevant to your goals and materials, and to current events. Adapt the following suggestions for previewing activities, or create your own activities.

Synopsis of video: *The Oregon Story: Agricultural Workers* deals with the role of agricultural workers, especially those of Hispanic descent, in the history and economy of Oregon, as well as the social, health, and human rights issues facing them.

WHERE does the food you eat come from? Who worked in the fields and harvested the agricultural products? Trace the production chain from the farm to your table. How are agricultural and migrant workers involved in this process?

DO you live near an agricultural area in Oregon that relies on the work of Hispanic agricultural workers? What do you know about the life and work of agricultural workers? What do you think makes life as a farmworker unique?

USE a road map to locate places considered in the video program. These places include: Independence, Woodburn, Hood River, Nyssa, Boardman, and Ontario. Which of these places are located near you?

BRAINSTORM how your life is impacted by the work of agricultural workers in Oregon.

FIND out which agricultural crops are grown, harvested, and processed near you. In what ways are migrant farmworkers involved in the agricultural cycle?

DEFINE what the word "migrant" means. How would a migrant farmworker's life be the same as and different from your life?

HOW has life in Oregon been changed by the addition of new traditions and culture from the Hispanic community?

BRAINSTORM the challenges and opportunities that face children from Hispanic families as reflected in this statement from the video: "They are in two cultures, and they are expected to not only fulfill everything that their family wants them to fulfill ... but they're also expected to integrate perfectly into the American society."

View It

Adapt the following suggestions for emphasis while viewing the program or create your own activities, suggestions, and areas of focus. Remember to stop or pause, back up and review, and take time to replay the video to enhance the learning experience.

ANALYZE a map of Oregon to see where agricultural products are raised today. What land, water, and other natural resources are located on these lands?

IN what ways is agriculture a "mighty engine of the Oregon economy"? What evidence can you find to support the statement that "the public understands the importance of the farmer ... but not the farmworker?"

FOCUS on the "Latinization of Oregon" and the values of traditional Hispanic culture as they relate to time, ownership, nature, and the land. Consider, for example, the concept of "aguante," which means endurance and patience, cooperation, giving, love of family, respect for rules, and harmony with nature. How do these values compare with the "typical lifestyle" of twenty-first century Oregon? Which particular values do you want to enhance in your life and why?

REVIEW the life and accomplishments of César Chávez and his work in promoting better living, health, and work conditions for migrant farmworkers in the U.S.

COMPARE the meaning of the following terms: Anglos, Latinos, Hispanics, Mexican nationals, Mexican-Americans, and Chicanos.

INVITE a member of a farmworker family to visit your classroom to discuss how his or her family has been affected by the United Farm Workers Union, the braceros program, Public Law 78, and other landmark events in farming history.

RESEARCH examples of nonviolent protests in world history (e.g., Gandhi in India, Martin Luther King Jr. in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, and César Chávez in the farmworker movement.) How effective do you think nonviolence has been and will be in future protests?

READ or view *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck. Compare and contrast the story of the fictional Joad family with those of the migrant agricultural families portrayed in the video. How

has the migrant experience changed and/or remained the same during the 60 years since Steinbeck wrote this novel?

FIND evidence in the video that shows that agricultural growth in Oregon is also shadowed by poverty.

REVIEW the traditional stereotype of a migrant worker. In what ways is it inaccurate and oversimplified? What evidence is there in the video that counteracts this stereotype today? What harmful effects do you think this stereotype has caused for migrant workers and their families in Oregon?

BRAINSTORM ways in which living and working conditions might be improved for farmworkers and their families in Oregon. How might these improvements help foster economic development in Oregon while preserving the farmworkers' traditional values at the same time?

DEBATE the pros and cons of recent proposals for collective bargaining for agricultural workers.

COMPARE several of the picture books in the resources list (for example, *Going Home*) about the life and values of migrant workers. "Opportunities" is a theme that is reiterated throughout many of these books. What opportunities do you think migrant workers are gaining? What losses do you think they are experiencing?

Extend It

Adapt the following extensions or create new ones! Remember, the best extension is direct experience of Oregon's land and people!

Agricultural Workers and the Making Of Oregon

WRITE a fictional story or stage a play that shows how a child in a farm family might have experienced one of the following events in Oregon history: the Great Depression, World War II and the Braceros Program, Public Law 78, or César Chávez's table grape boycott.

COMPARE the goal of assimilating people into the dominant American culture with the goal of preserving the cultural diversity of all people in Oregon. What do you think/hope the goal will be in the future and why?

REFLECT on the statement that defines migrant farmworkers as "the most unorganizable, most powerless people on earth." Find evidence in the video that supports or refutes this statement.

DEVELOP a series of maps of the area defined as Oregon today, from the time prior to European settlement to the present. Include the locations of traditional agricultural migrant routes and the crops harvested.

RESEARCH the Mexican American Political Association and its role in helping or hindering migrant farmworkers in Oregon.

LEARN more about the traditions of Hispanic Americans in Oregon by attending Hispanic cultural events and celebrations (For example, Fiesta Mexicana in Woodburn, Fiesta Latina in Eugene, Portland, and other communities, Cinco de Mayo, Dieciséis de Septiembre or Mexican Independence Day celebrations, concerts of Hermiston's Grupo Folklórico Quetzalcoatl or Ballet Folklórico de Woodburn, Día de Los Muertos, and El Día de la Cosecha, the harvest, outdoor Mass in Hermiston).

EXPLORE museums and exhibits that portray local histories of Hispanic people of Oregon. Keep a list of "I didn't know that!" statements about what you gleaned from the displays and artifacts.

RESEARCH the "braceros" or guest worker program of World War II. What benefits and problems did it produce for the farmowners, guest workers, Mexican-Americans, and the United States in general?

RESPOND to the statement/feeling of many migrant workers that "Our roots are in México, but our lives are here."

Agricultural Worker Activities and Management

DRAW a yearly map to show the time of harvests and a typical migratory route of farmworkers in different regions of Oregon.

LIST the challenges that face agricultural workers and their families as they seek to provide schooling for their children. What should school districts and other agencies do to help ensure that these children receive the education that they are entitled to by the Constitution?

ROLE-PLAY a dialogue between yourself and another person, one of you taking the role of a person living in a city and one of you taking the role of a person living in a migrant labor camp. Discuss the similarities and differences in your lives by considering typical activities, pace of life, amount of time spent outdoors, viewscape, common sounds, concerns and values, use of technology, and recreational opportunities. What would each of you miss if you were to exchange places with one another?

INVESTIGATE the role of other immigrant groups that have been part of the history and economic development of Oregon: Hawaiians, Japanese, Chinese, Irish, African-Americans, etc. Compare and contrast their experiences with those of Hispanic immigrants to Oregon.

DEVELOP a decision tree laying out different alternatives for promoting awareness about the issues facing agricultural workers in Oregon: housing, health care, education, pesticides, fair wages, etc.

Agricultural Workers and Ecology

DISCUSS how policies related to timber, salmon, mining, clean water, and other natural resources intersect with the lives and work of agricultural workers in Oregon.

INVESTIGATE the use of pesticides in agricultural areas of Oregon. Do you agree with the statement by Piñeros y Campesinos Unidos de Noroeste (PCUN) (Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United) that "Oregon agriculture depends on pesticides"? What protections are in place to protect the health and safety of farmworkers using pesticides and of the consumers who eat the agricultural products?

DEVELOP a set of guidelines that you think are necessary for both protecting the agri-business future of Oregon and for protecting the health and safety of agricultural workers.

EXPLAIN how Oregon's habitat is being affected by pesticides. Do you believe these safeguards are adequate?

INVITE guest speakers to visit your classroom to discuss the interconnections of the agricultural and ecological "web" in Oregon. Include representatives of the farming community, farmworkers union, food processing plants, grocery stores, and consumers and compare their points of view. What compromises have been necessary for agriculture in Oregon?

VISIT one of the farm labor camps in Oregon. Prepare a slide report showing the living situation for the workers as well as the habitat, plants, and animals of the area. What was the condition of this ecosystem 100 years ago? What is the current condition of this ecosystem? What protections are in place to ensure the health for all involved in this ecosystem?

Innovation and Change

SELECT an important problem facing agricultural workers of Hispanic descent in Oregon today, for example high rural unemployment, poor health, unsanitary living conditions in labor camps, pesticide exposure, and lack of educational resources. Outline a plan to help solve it. Send your plan to the appropriate government agency or your local newspaper.

DEBATE the controversies that have arisen about providing educational, medical, workers' compensation insurance, and other benefits to farmworkers.

REACT to the statement by Rose Lewis of Brooks, Oregon: "There is a squeeze on the farmer and a bigger squeeze on the farm worker." Do you agree or disagree with the conclusion of the League of Women Voters that higher food prices may be needed to help solve the problems facing farmers and farm workers in Oregon?

PREPARE a set of questions and use them to interview an agricultural worker about changes that have occurred in his/her life, work, family situation, traditions, and relationship to natural resources. Write an article about this person and submit it to a local magazine or newspaper.

CONSIDER the demographics of Oregon today. Develop and present a slide program that details what you think the future of agricultural workers in Oregon will be as the state continues to move toward an economy that is less resource-based. Provide support for your position(s).

RESEARCH how technological changes (transportation, farm equipment, harvesting and food processing equipment, fax machines, the Internet, and use of chemicals, etc.) are affecting agricultural workers and their families in Oregon.

REVIEW the history of labor unions in the United States, up to the present time. For what reasons were they created? What similarities and differences are there between industrial labor unions and farmworkers unions? Are they still needed today? Find evidence and statistics to support your answer.

The Savvy Citizen

SPECULATE about how you think changes in the economy, for example, a weakened stock market, inflation, recession, or rise in state population, might affect agricultural workers and immigration in Oregon.

SURVEY students in your school and adults in your community about whether they would be willing to pay more for their food in order to provide better wages for the agricultural workers involved in producing the crops.

RESEARCH and debate the Agricultural Job Opportunity Benefits and Security Act, which Florida Senator Bob Graham is proposing to replace H-2A, the current foreign guest-worker program. Write a letter to your Senator explaining what you think the advantages and disadvantages of passing this new legislation would be for farmworkers, farm owners, consumers, and other affected groups.

EVALUATE the 2000 Census data and prepare posters with pie charts to show how the ethnic make-up of the population of Oregon has changed between 1990 and 2000. What do local and state governments, school districts, businesses, and other organizations need to do to respond to these new statistics?

BRAINSTORM some conclusions about the future of agricultural workers and agricultural development in the U.S. and in Oregon.

EXAMINE the black eagle symbol of the National Farm Workers Union of America and their slogan "When that eagle flies, the farm workers' problems will be solved!" What images and values does it symbolize? What do you foresee as the future of farmworkers in the U.S.?

REFLECT on the statement by Professor Erasmo Gamboa in the video: "We are a different Oregon and I think we're a better Oregon, but not just because of Mexican people or persons of Mexican descent, but because of Asian immigration, of Middle Eastern immigration, of European immigrants. I think this is a healthier state than it was — socially speaking, than it was 30 or 40 years ago."

WRITE a poem or draw a picture to express the feelings stated by Felix Oliveros in the video: "When my father would take us out to the fields, we would work and ... that's one of the things that I look back at now is that there was this pride, but also this contentment that you are

providing for yourself. That you're working to better yourself." How does the work of Hispanic agricultural workers "transform Oregon" and how does Oregon also "reinvent" Hispanic workers?

A Chronology of Agricultural Workers in Oregon

Thousands of years before present

Approximately 100 tribes of Native Americans inhabit the region we define as Oregon today.

1603

Explorer Sebastian Vizcaino is the first European to map and name points in Oregon (for example, Cape Sebastian and Cape Blanco).

1774

Juan Perez leads the first of many Spanish expeditions to explore the Oregon Country coastline.

1804-1806

Captains Lewis and Clark travel with their party from Missouri to the mouth of the Columbia River. President Thomas Jefferson believes a settlement at Astoria will be a key to expanding the American empire west all the way to the Pacific Ocean.

1800s

Early trapping parties perceive agricultural potential in the Willamette Valley. Latinos come to Oregon as gold miners, mule packers to supply militia troops and mining camps during the "Indian wars," railroad workers, and as "vaqueros" or cowboys in Eastern Oregon.

1819

The Transcontinental Treaty officially transfers all Spanish claims north of the 42nd parallel, including the Oregon Territory, to the United States.

1821

Mexico gains independence from Spain.

1843

Civil government is established in the Oregon Country. Major immigration to Oregon begins along the Oregon Trail, with over 53,000 people traveling the Oregon Trail between 1840 and 1850.

1846-48

Mexican-American War. Until 1848, the northern border of Mexico was only a few miles south of Ashland, Oregon.

1848

The Oregon Territory is organized.

1850

Congress passes Oregon Donation Land Act as a reward to pioneers for settling in Oregon.

Seth Lewelling brings first fruit tree seeds to family nursery business in Oregon.

1859

Congress ratifies the Oregon State Constitution, and the state accepts the congressional proposal to be admitted to the Union.

1862

Congress passes the Homestead Act, deeding 160 acres to those who will live on and work the land.

1868

Corvallis College, designated as the Agricultural College of Oregon (now Oregon State University), is the first state-supported institution of higher education in Oregon.

1883

The transcontinental railroad is completed.

1900

There are between 380,000 and 560,000 Mexican-Americans living in the U.S.

1910

The Mexican Revolution causes poverty and other disruptions in Mexico.

1917

The United States enters World War I. Agencies in Mexico recruit for railroad and agricultural workers in the U.S.

1924

U.S. Bureau of Immigration and U.S. Border Patrol are established to control immigration. Free travel between Mexico and United States ends.

1929

The Great Depression begins. Many white migrant farm laborers move to Oregon from areas known as the "Dust Bowl."

1930

There are approximately 600,000 Mexicans living and working in the U.S.

1935

National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) gives all workers, except farmworkers, the right to organize, strike, and bargain collectively with their employers.

1939

The Repatriation Program deports approximately 500,000 people of Mexican descent, including many Mexican-American citizens.

John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* is published, addressing the conditions of Dust Bowl farmworkers, but ignoring the Mexican farmworkers.

1940

Less than 400,000 Mexicans are living and working in the U.S.

1941

The United States enters World War II.

1942

Bracero Program ("manual labor") using legal Mexican migrant workers is begun after farmers fear that World War II labor shortages will keep crops from being picked. An estimated 15,136 Mexican men enter the Oregon agricultural labor market for temporary employment.

1947

The Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act is implemented to regulate the distribution, sale, and use of pesticides in the U.S.

1951

Public Law 78 is passed, which allows growers to hire braceros (guest workers) to make up for what growers call a "manpower emergency" after first making "reasonable efforts" to hire American workers. In the first year alone, 204,000 Mexican citizens go to the U.S. to work for less than minimum wage and without benefits, taking jobs away from U.S. citizens and legal residents.

1959

American farmworkers earn an average of \$829 and do 138 days of work per year.

1962

César Chávez and Dolores Huerta establish the United Farm Workers Union based in California.

1963

The Farm Labor Contractor Registration Act requires farm labor contractors to register with the government and keep records to help protect farmworkers.

1965

Valley Migrant League is established to improve housing, health, and educational services for migrants in the Willamette Valley. Treasure Valley Community College begins a similar migrant program in Ontario. National Farm Workers Association begins grape strike, which lasts five years.

Immigration Act of 1965 allows Hispanic citizens and resident aliens in Oregon to petition to bring their families and immediate relatives to the U.S. without per-country limits. Political and economic turmoil in Latin America causes an increasing number of Latin Americans to emigrate.

1966

Club Latino Americano and the Hispanic community in Woodburn organize their first annual Mexican Fiesta.

National Farm Workers Association joins with the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee to become the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee of the AFL-CIO.

1969

Governor Tom McCall creates Advisory Committee on Chicano Affairs.

1970

The National Environmental Policy Act is implemented.

1972

Presidential candidate George McGovern visits farm labor camp and is physically sickened by the harsh conditions.

1973

Colegio César Chávez, the first Latino four-year college in the U.S, is created on the former campus of Mount Angel College.

1975

Agricultural Labor Relations Act is passed by the State of California. This is the first law to protect the right of farmworkers to organize.

1977

Severe drought and plummeting farm prices bring about a farming strike. More than 100 tractors block the streets in Salem.

1978

The Federal Pesticide Act is passed.

1982

The U.S. Supreme Court case *Plyler v. Doe* rules that students cannot be denied access to public education because of immigration status.

1983

Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act ensures more protections for farmworkers, including health and safety standards for housing, and liability to farmers and labor contractors.

1984

Second grape boycott organized by César Chávez and National Farm Workers Association.

1985

PCUN (Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste/Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United), the largest farmworkers' advocacy organization in Oregon, is founded to unite and organize farmworkers in order to improve their working conditions.

1986

The H-2A Agriculture Guestworker Program is adopted. Immigration Reform and Control Act is passed, which grants amnesty to all illegal immigrants who have been in the U.S. since January 1, 1982. 2.3 million Mexicans and 100,000 people from South America become legal permanent residents between 1986 and 1992.

1988

César Chávez fasts for 36 days to protest pesticide use. PCUN starts project to quantify pesticide use, document pesticide exposures, and educate farmworkers about pesticide use and exposure.

1989

Trade deficit of nearly \$1.7 billion in food products in U.S.

Oregon Legislature passes bills to provide tax credits for building new farm labor housing, improving the standards for housing in labor camps, and providing food and housing for migrant workers from hiring until harvest.

PCUN signs first agricultural collective bargaining agreement in the history of Oregon.

1990

Agreement is signed with Mexican government allowing Mexican farmworkers in the U.S. to provide medical benefits to their families in Mexico.

There are 382 registered farm labor camps in Oregon. There are 112,707 Hispanics in Oregon, about four percent of the total population.

1991

PCUN organizes and leads the first farmworker strike in Oregon. They win a 33 percent wage increase for strawberry pickers.

1992

PCUN starts nationwide boycott of grower-owned NORPAC canneries ("FLAV-R-PAC" and "Santiam" products) when a NORPAC grower refuses to negotiate with union.

1993

César Chávez dies on April 23.

1994

North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is created.

Award-winning farmworker housing complex called "Nuevo Avancer" ("New Dawn") is built by PCUN in Woodburn.

1996

Immigration and Welfare Reform Act disqualifies legal immigrants who are not yet citizens from receiving public assistance and Social Security. Border patrols are increased to reduce illegal immigration.

In 1996, 11,000 visas are issued to H-2A workers, and 12,000 visas are issued to H-2B workers.

The Food Quality Protection Act limits amount of pesticide residue on foods to levels children can tolerate.

1999

Farmgate value of Oregon agriculture is approximately \$3.4 billion. Food processing adds another \$2 billion. Value of Oregon agricultural exports stands at \$2.99 billion. Other direct and indirect agricultural activities place the industry's economic impact at about 10% of the state's gross product.

In the U.S., migrant workers account for 11.9% of all agricultural workers. Fieldworkers earn an average of \$7.73/hour.

The Hispanic population of Oregon is about 213,000, or 6 percent of the state's population.

California's Proposition 187, which denied undocumented children the right to education and health services, is ruled unconstitutional.

2000

It is estimated that 150,000 agricultural workers, primarily Hispanic, work in Oregon during some part of each year. Less than 10,000 live in the 382 registered farm labor camps.

Jose Arciga Apartments are built and named for a 7-year-old Washington County boy who died from congenital birth defects caused by his mother's exposure to pesticides. (Nov. 21, 2000 *Oregonian*)

2000 census figures show that the Hispanic population of Oregon has doubled from 1990 to approximately 275,314.

In November, the third United Farm Workers Union boycott of California table grapes, which lasted 16 years, is ended.

Present

Largest agricultural industry in terms of value is greenhouse and nursery crops. The average Oregon farmworker earns about \$8,000 per year and has a life expectancy of 48 years.

Implementation of Oregon's statewide pesticide use reporting system will require collecting and evaluating quantities and locations of pesticides on all agricultural and forest products.

More to Read and View

Books and Chapters

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Materials For Young Readers

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--Mi Gente: The Community Through Our Eyes. Video available from Northwest Film Center, 2001.

--Oregon Agriculture: A Growing Industry. Video available for loan from Oregon Department of Agriculture, Information Office (503-986-4550) Thirteen-minute VHS video overview of the key agricultural production regions in the state and the contribution of the industry to Oregon's economy.

--Tonale: Our Deeper Selves. Video available from Northwest Film Center, 2001.

Internet Sites Related to *The Oregon Story: Agricultural Workers*

Armchair Tour of Oregon Agriculture, Oregon Department of Agriculture:

http://www.oda.state.or.us/ODA/TOUR%20Folder/OR_Ag_TOUR.html

Oregon's Leading Industry: From Farm to Table, Oregon Department of Agriculture:

<http://www.oda.state.or.us/Information/FarmToTable/index.html>

United Farm Workers (includes history and audio clips of César Chávez):

<http://www.ufw.org/>

PCUN (Piñeros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste/Treeplanters and Farmworkers United of the Northwest):

<http://www.pcun.org/>

Pesticide Action Network:

<http://www.panna.org/panna/>