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'Hope' brings migrant worker flood

By LUCILLE WARREN
Of the Argus

Migrant farm workers are arriving daily from California, Mexico and Guatemala in an effort to stake claims to what little housing is available and the few jobs being offered in Washington County.

And most predict more will follow their footsteps by the end of April or early in May.

Monday was the first official day the camps could be open under state laws for seasonal housing. A visit to half a dozen camps told the same story.

"This camp has been full three or four weeks," said Miguel Leone, 44, whose wife and four children live in Baja, Mexico. "Times are bad there, too."

Miguel believes many workers will visit Oregon for the first time this year. No field work exists in California because of the February frost damage and drought conditions.

"Jobs are scarce and many people are looking," he said. The few jobs available are in ornamental plant nurseries or pruning.

"There aren't a lot of jobs at this point," said Sue Brewer, Hillsboro employment division.

"We're getting out a few people for day work, but there's probably not going to be a lot of employment until the harvest season starts."

"We're not open," one camp operator said. He claimed workers had removed screens from cabin windows over the weekend to get

into shelter.

The parking lot at the camp was over-run with cars. Trash barrels were full and the unemployed workers sat in the sun.

At Centro Cultural in Cornelius, men waited outside for doors to open.

Nineteen-year-old Jaime Lemos said he'd been in Washington County nearly a week. His papers were under a new immigration program, Safe Haven, which allows people to apply for asylum.

An automatic six-month stay can be renewed up to 18 months.

Jamie got his papers in California, where he'd been detained four months.

Some 20 or 30 men were in the Centro parking lot.

"These people come to do the job that we won't do," said Jose Jaime, coordinator of education and translation services at Centro.

Jaime insists that most migrant workers who come to Centro seeking help have been lured to Oregon by false information.

"They're told if they come they will live in free housing, in a land of plenty where they can almost pick money off the trees," Jaime said.

"These people bring resources; the sweat and toil for their labor for which they're paid little. They're the backbone of the agriculture economy."

"They're lured here by a bunch of lies," Jaime said. "And then there's nothing when they get here; no housing, no jobs, nothing."

At Centro, farm workers are of-



Argus photo by Lucille Warren

Migrant farm workers pass the time at an area camp waiting for work in area fields.

ferred a free, hot noon meal. Often they wait there hoping someone will come along to give them work for the day.

Jaime said the community support helps Centro feed workers. "Whenever the sign goes out, we get help and we appreciate it," Jaime

said. "Centro lives like the poor we serve; on a day-to-day basis."

One grower blamed the large numbers of migrant workers on the

worker grapevine that assures them they'll be housed and fed by agencies and churches once they get

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Many more migrants expected

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here. "The more people give, the worse it becomes," he said.

Ignacio Garcia from Oaxaca, Mexico, has been here eight days from California, where he'd worked pruning grapes until that was finished.

When asked whether he knows others who are coming, he said, "Mas." Many are coming to try to find work. "Thousands will arrive by the end of the month."

Garcia has been to Washington County before. He came early, he said, to try to find a place to stay and, perhaps, work in a nursery

until strawberry harvest.

The camp where he stays, he said, is full, but the owner is trying to limit the numbers to eight people per cabin. He pays \$10 a week to stay there as do the others.

Jaime Lemos has been trying to find an apartment or some place to rent. To do so, he must pay an application fee of \$25, which is not refundable and may not help find him a bed.

"Some are lucky to find friends who will take them in," said Jose Jaime. Otherwise they sleep in their cars, if they have cars, or under trees.

At least two camps were not full

and officially were open. "We're just getting things fixed up for the pre-occupancy inspection," said Lloyd Duyck, a Cornelius area grower.

Duyck, however, said he has less space than last year. He's removed one camp that was on rented ground: the family camp. Next year he plans to replace some of the older housing, but also to have fewer workers.

"We've got people who've been coming for years," Duyck said. He also is seeing new faces and turning away people.

Duyck said he plans to cut his strawberry acreage. Where he once

employed between 200 and 300 pickers in previous years, he estimates he'll have work for no more than 180 this year and no more than 120 in 1992.

Duyck said he's cutting back to minimize the effect of county, state and federal regulation on his operation.

Darla Tankersley, who operates Tankersley Farms for her father, Ron, said Monday their camps will not open until just before strawberry harvest, perhaps as late as May.

"There have been no pre-occupancy inspections," she said. "They (OR-OSHA) just give us more trouble if we let people in without the inspections."

She said the year-round building at Little Beaver Camp in North Plains is full. "We're turning people away and sending them to Centro."

Chris Ottoson, with OR-OSHA's Portland consultation office, said consultants look at camps on request to assist owners to comply with rules and regulations.

The program is voluntary, with inspectors going out only at the request of the employer. He emphasized the inspections are confidential and not shared with the enforcement division of OR-OSHA.

Tomas Schwabe, whose division is in charge of enforcement, said he does not believe the large influx from California will arrive in Oregon.

"So far it's not occurring," he said. Most camps are occupied, he said. "But so far, I haven't seen any occupied to capacity."

Monday's tour showed larger numbers than usually are here at this time of the year. It also showed many without legal papers, here just hoping to find someone who will look the other way.

"Why do you come if you have no papers and there is no work for those without papers?"

"They hope," one man answered. "It's the last thing you lose; hope."

Dam said safe, doing needed job

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impending flood.

Within a half hour after TVID followed emergency notification procedures, there was a radio warning, Wilson said. "I heard it myself."

He saw no need for notification procedures to change. "We notified the emergency network. Beyond that, I can't answer."

And he urged those who feel they have suffered damage from the flood to submit claims under the district's liability insurance.

James Mumford, the BOR chief of dam safety, said the dam performed as it was designed to do. "At no time was the dam in danger of failing."

The dam is owned by the Bureau of Reclamation, but is operated by TVID under guidelines specified by the Corps of Engineers.

Mumford said the flood peak had been reduced by 10 percent and that the flood had been delayed from night to daylight hours.

He estimated the Scoggin Creek flood had been reduced by 1,600 acre-feet of water, the amount of space reserved in the reservoir for flood control.



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