

**Bracero Oral History Project
Guide for Interviewing Braceros**

Family background, childhood, education, early employment

When and where were you born?
Tell me about your family and your hometown.
What did your parents do for a living?
Did you come from a large family?
Where do your brothers and sisters live now?
Did any of your brothers or other family members work as braceros?

Tell me about your schooling.
Where did you go to school?
How many years did you go to school?
Did you learn to read and write?
Did you have a paying job while you were in school?

How old were you when you started to work?
Tell me about your first job.

The hiring process

How did you find out about the bracero program?
What did they call the bracero program in Mexico?
Where were you living at that time?
What kind of job did you have then?
How old were you? Were you married?
Had you ever thought about working in the U.S. before that time?
Why did you decide to go to the U.S?
What were your fears? Expectations?
Did your family influence your decision? Explain.

Describe the hiring process.
What were the qualifications to become a bracero?
What did you have to do to prove you met those requirements?
When and where did you enlist?
What did the authorities, Mexican or American, tell you to expect about your job?
Did they tell you anything about your salary, living conditions, meals, or transportation?
How did you travel from the recruiting place to the reception center in the U.S.?
Describe the trip.

Where did you cross the border?
What happened at the reception center?
Describe the reception center.
What did you have to do to get a work permit? Medical exam? Immunizations?
Did you have any choice as to type of work, length of employment, salary, location?
Did you have anything to say about where you were sent to work?
Were you allowed to keep some personal belongings?
What happened after you completed the process and received your work permit?

Job experiences

How many years did you work in the bracero program in the U.S.? Which years?

In how many different places did you work as a bracero?

Tell me about the place where you worked for the longest time?

How did you get there from the border reception center?

Describe the journey.

What did they produce at that farm/ranch?

Describe the work you did as a bracero.

How many braceros worked there with you?

Tell me about the other braceros who worked there. Did you make lasting friendships?

Did the work crew include men who were in the U.S. illegally? If yes, what was the attitude toward them?

Did your employer know you by name?

Did you have much contact with your employer or his family?

How were you treated?

How did your employer communicate with you? Did he speak Spanish?

Did officials from Mexico ever come to the place where you worked?

Did the Border Patrol ever come to check on workers? If so, what happened?

How did you communicate with your family in Mexico? Letters? Telephone? Visits?

How often did you get to see your family during the years you worked as a bracero?

If you were a bracero during the war, 1942-1945, did World War II affect your life?

Did you know about wartime rationing of food, shoes, or gasoline?

How did you hear news about the war?

Did you know any braceros who joined the American armed forces?

Daily routine and living conditions

How many days a week did you work?

How many hours per day?

Describe a typical workday.

Tell me about your meals. What did you eat? Where did you eat?

Did you have to pay for your meals? How did you pay for your meals?

What was your opinion of the food? Did you get enough to eat?

Describe the housing and interior furnishings: beds, chairs, heaters.

What about bathrooms? Indoor plumbing?

How did you wash your clothes?

Did your employer provide personal items? Toothbrush, soap, towel, razor, blanket?

Salary

How much was your salary?

Were you paid in cash? By check?

How often did you get paid?

What did you do with the money?

How would you send money back home to Mexico?

Did you manage to save any money?

Did all braceros get paid the same amount?

Was there ever any problem getting paid?
Did you always receive the correct pay for hours worked?
Was money ever withheld from your pay? If so, do you know why?

Problems on the job

Did you ever have any problems at work? What kind of problems?
What would happen in case of accident or illness?
What were the most common complaints? Food, lodging, employer, salary?
What could you do if you didn't like your job?
Did you encounter any prejudice? If so, describe what happened.
Did you and your co-workers ever organize a labor protest? If yes, what happened? What were the consequences?

Recreation

What did you do on your day/s off work?
Were you free to come and go as you wished?
What did you and your fellow braceros do together for entertainment? Sports? Movies?
Did you have radios? Was there a Spanish-language station?
Where was the closest town?
How did you get to town? What would you do there?
Was there a Catholic Church nearby? Did you attend mass? Confession?
Did you go home to Mexico for any holidays?
How did you celebrate Easter and Christmas?
Did you celebrate Mexican national holidays (16th of September) in bracero camps?

Life after bracero work

Did you return to Mexico following each job contract?
Did your employer provide transportation back to Mexico?
After you completed your work contract, how did you get a new one?
What had to be done to receive an authorization to return to the U.S. to work? A mica?
Did you ever just quit your job as a bracero? Where did you go?
If you did not go home to Mexico, what did you do in the U.S.?
Did you become a citizen of the U.S.? When?
Did you learn to speak English?
Tell me about your life after working as a bracero.

Final reflections

What does the term bracero mean to you?
How did you feel about being called a bracero?
In general, are your memories of working as a bracero mostly positive or negative?
Did being a bracero change your life in any way?