

Guide for Interviewing Farmers

Personal background

When and where were you born?
Where did you grow up and go to school?
How and when did this farm come into your family?
Did you work on the farm as a child?

Farm history

What did you grow in the 1940s? 1950s 1960s? Who picked the cotton (or other crop) on your farm before and during WWII?
What were the big challenges for cotton growers in the 50s and 60s?
Did your farm employ sharecroppers?
Did your farm employ day-haul laborers from Memphis?
Were the workers on the farm white? Black? Did you ever bring other immigrant workers, e.g. Jamaicans?
Did your farm ever employ Texas-Mexicans?
How many acres did you have at the time you hired braceros?
What organizations were important to you? Farm Bureau? Extension Service? Cotton Growers Association? Others?
When did you begin to mechanize picking?

The hiring/transportation process

How did you first hear about the bracero program?
Explain why you decided to employ braceros.
What problems did hiring braceros solve?
What did you have to do to hire braceros? What were the regulations? Paperwork?
How many years did you employ braceros? Which years?
How many braceros do you think you employed over the years?
What was the usual length of a work contract?
How were braceros assigned?
How were the braceros transported to your farm?
Did you ever go to a bracero processing center, reception center in Mexico and/or Texas?
If so, describe what was happening there.

Government regulations

What were you required to provide the bracero workers you hired?
What were the minimum requirements as to salary, living quarters, food, medical care?
Did any government officials, INS, or Border Patrol agents check to see if you met the requirements? If so, how was that done?
Did the braceros who worked for you live at your farm? Always? Usually?
Where did the braceros sleep and eat?
Tell me about the meals. Who prepared the food? Who paid for the meals?

Did you have any responsibility if one of the braceros became ill or had an accident? Did you keep track of what you paid each worker? How did you do that? Were you required to withhold any taxes from their pay?

Farm work

Describe the work performed by braceros on your farm?
Walk me through their typical work day during the growing and harvesting seasons. What tools did they use? Did you provide tools, gloves, hats, clothes of any kind? Did braceros perform field work only? What other work did you have them do? Did they drive tractors, trucks? Were they allowed to operate agricultural machines? How was the work organized? Crews? What did white folks on your farm think about the braceros? Black folks?

Relationship with braceros

How much contact did you have with the braceros? Explain?
Did you know any of the braceros by name?
Does any one particular bracero stand out in your memory? If so, explain.
Did any one bracero become an especially valued employee?
Did you have a foreman? What was his relationship to braceros?
What did braceros do on their day/s off?
What did they do for fun?
Did you give them any special privileges? Paid vacation days?
What did they do on holidays?
What did the braceros do with their money?

At the end of the contract

When the contract ended, what did the braceros usually do? Did they leave? Go back to Mexico? Go work for somebody else in the area?
What were your obligations at the end of the work contract?
What was the procedure to extend or renew a contract?
Did you have any braceros work for you every year? For many years?

Problems

Did you have any problems with braceros? If so, explain.
What were the major problems?
Were there any incidents of fighting? Criminal behavior?
Did they complain to you about living conditions, wages, food?
What were the major complaints?
Did braceros ever stage a strike or labor protest in your area? If so, describe what happened.
Did you ever have dealings with the Mexican consuls in Memphis and/or Texas?

Final Reflections

How did mechanization change cotton farming? What were the first mechanical pickers like? What did the workers think of mechanization? When did you start using herbicides?

Did that cut your labor needs?

Why did the bracero program end? What did you do without braceros?

Did you ever employ Mexicans other than braceros? Where they legal?

How did the bracero program affect your employment of Mexicans and/or Tejanos?

Did you ever have a mixed crew of braceros and illegals?

What is your opinion of bracero work performance?

How did their work compare to the work of American or Texas-Mexican farmhands?

Did you notice any animosity between braceros and other farm employees?

What were the advantages and disadvantages of the bracero program?

What factors contributed to the program's demise?

Should the bracero program be revived?