

3338 ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ACT AMENDMENTS OF 1967

The program, operating in seven states, Arkansas, Indiana, Minnesota, New Jersey, Oregon, Virginia and Wisconsin, employed a maximum of 800 worker-trainees and had wide-scaled community, state and congressional acceptance despite the challenge of employing a group of men given up by most programs as hopeless. The average age has been 67 and the average income before the project was \$900.00 a year. Heavy in-kind contributions come from state and community sources.

"To many of them," says Tony T. Dechant, President of Green Thumb and Farmers Union, "this means the difference between staying in their own homes and leading their own productive lives or being dependent on the state of their children."

All the men who are hired by the project must pass physical examinations. They work hard and as one foreman expressed it, "there's no goofing off. My main problem is to keep those old fellows from working too hard."

The problem of the older retired worker in rural areas of the country has been a cause of grave concern to President Johnson who, in a communication to the Senate in March, 1967, said, "Hundreds of older unemployed and retired farmers and rural workers have gained in income and dignity while contributing to the safety and beautification of state highways, schools, parks and rural towns through projects as Green Thumb. I have asked the Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity in cooperation with the Secretaries of Agriculture and Labor to expand this activity and to develop new ways to provide meaningful public service opportunities to the elderly in rural areas."

Evaluations have shown the Green Thumb program is effective in aiding these men who are in deep poverty and prolonged unemployment to regain dignity and purpose in life and escape from the depths of poverty. It is a pioneer effort to show the abilities and potentials of older and retired low income farmers as employable workers.

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COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES FOR SENIOR ARKANSAS PROJECT AIDS RURAL ELDERLY

An Arkansas Farmers Union project is playing good neighbor to elderly people in need who have no one else to care for them. The pilot program known as CASA—Community Action for Senior Arkansans—is being conducted in six Arkansas counties, financed by the Administration on Aging (HEW).

Rod Jones, Director for Arkansas Farmers Union CASA Program, made a report illustrated with colored slides at the Annual Conference of States Executives on Aging sponsored by the Administration of Aging (HEW) at the Washington Hilton, June 19th.

CASA helps aged and needy residents in Conway, Izard, Lonoke, Prairie Sharpe and Stone counties to spend their declining days in a little more comfort.

Two or three senior citizens are employed as interviewers and aides in each county. They work three days a week and receive \$1.40 an hour. Their job is to find people in out-of-the-way rural places who are in need of help and to give them the aid they need.

Since last November, when the program got underway, 2,500 persons ranging in age from 65 to 104 have been interviewed or helped by the CASA workers.

The average age of the people living in need is 73 and their incomes average less than \$950 yearly.