

rural families are *chronically* poor. The families of hired farm workers, domestic migratory farm workers, and sharecroppers are in this category."

These thousands of Americans are poor in every conceivable way. Their average yearly income is around \$1,000, less than one third the poverty level income determined by the Administration. Farm workers lack the educational opportunities that might offer them an alternative way of life. They are poor in environment, often with no permanent homes, and are forced to accept miserable substitutes (often chicken coops, autos, uninsulated sheds) for temporary housing; viewed with hostility by residents, farm workers are often denied the community's health and recreational facilities. Farm workers are often denied citizenship opportunities, as they suffer both from discrimination and from lack of power, due to their forced mobility and the absence of legislative protections. Lastly, they are poor in hopes for their children, who are early subjected to deprivations that close off escape routes from the cycle of poverty.

But the last two years have seen, for the first time, a qualitative change for the better. Higher wages and expanded work opportunities have come as a result of dramatic cutbacks in the use of foreign workers, who had depressed farm wages for many years. Farmworkers are also increasingly eager to improve their own conditions, and the work of their fledgling labor unions has demonstrated their ability to do so. Farm workers have begun to develop health care services, credit unions, and co-ops; to undertake voter registration drives; to provide legal aid. As a result of their self-developed organization, farm workers are beginning to raise their own wages by means of their unified demands to growers. More attention is being given the rights (and, more importantly, infractions of those rights) of Mexican-American and Indian workers, both prominent in the farm labor force, as an aftermath of the civil rights victories.

A significant contribution to these encouraging developments has been the OEO program, which has finally provided some of the tools farm workers need in their struggle out of poverty. OEO alone will not solve the problems of farm workers. Given a fair chance, they will do that themselves. A living wage is their basic need. But OEO is working on every front where farm workers need help. It has day care centers and health centers. It is with migrants at home base, on the trek, and in work camps. It provides classes in citizenship and literacy, and develops vocational training programs.

No part of OEO is more important, either at present, or in the long run, than the education and training programs made possible under Title III-B, whose funds are facing an incredible cut this year from \$33 million to \$27 million. This cut must be restored.

Of all migrants over age 25, one third are functionally illiterate; 43 per cent have no more than an eighth grade education. Migrant children are always well behind their age-grade levels in schooling. Non-migrant seasonal farm workers are not quite so educationally disadvantaged, but their educational level is years below that of other workers.

Functional literacy must be the first step toward a decent life for these least noticed and least advantaged of the rural poor. If they cannot read, they cannot understand street signs, or notices, or instructions, or newspapers. They cannot qualify as citizens or take advantage of government programs outlined in attractive brochures. They are cut off from the twentieth century.

Half the people in Title III-B classes are between the educational levels of zero to Grade 3. OEO has estimated that it would reach 3 percent of adult illiterates in this fiscal year. What about the other 97 percent? How can we have the arrogance to cut the funds of a project like this, which is putting first things first and is providing the foundation without which progress is impossible? And if it is suggested that this is the job of the HEW and public education, the answer is obvious: they never reached the hard core rejects of their own system, and they cannot now. Title III-B has proved it can.

Title III-B does more than teach literacy (though the cry of one jubilant trainee, "I am no longer an X!" would appear to justify the program by itself). It also teaches practical skills which immediately improve the workers' conditions; how to run farm machinery; how to repair and build homes; homemaking; practical nursing or garage mechanics where there are shortages in these areas and the trainee wants off-farm work.

Here are a few examples of the variety of Title III-B programs. Note especially how training procedures and content are fitted to the unique needs of farm workers.