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**Guides for
Wartime Use of
Women on
Farms**

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

FRANCES PERKINS, SECRETARY

WOMEN'S BUREAU

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Guides for Wartime Use of Women on Farms



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Guides for Wartime Use of Women on Farms

The need for farm labor.

If the need of America's armed forces and the requirements of her allies are to be met, more food must be produced in the United States this year than ever before in history. Labor sufficient to sow and harvest the huge crop anticipated may not be available from the usual sources. Thousands of farm laborers have entered military service. Others are accepting employment in war industries because of their relatively higher wages. The shortage of automobile tires no doubt will reduce the supply of migratory workers who in normal times follow the crops from one agricultural area to another.

The use of women on farms.

The women of the Nation are eager to help in every possible way to win the war. The employment of women in manufacturing and in agriculture is nothing new. Since the outbreak of war the demand for women's services in the manufacturing of war equipment and munitions has greatly increased. Farmers also may find it necessary to use women in increasingly large numbers as the agricultural season develops. Farmers' wives and daughters will help in the fields to a greater extent than usual. Neighbors will exchange services more than is customarily the case, and women in nearby towns and villages doubtless will be available for short emergencies. In extreme emergencies the help of women from the cities may be needed to harvest the crops that will be necessary to win the war.

Principles to be observed.

Any plan for the increased use of women workers in the Nation's "food-for-victory" program should observe three main principles:

1. The recruiting of women for agricultural service should be done systematically and efficiently, and should be confined to those areas

in which a real need for women's services is anticipated. The agency best equipped to do the necessary recruiting is the United States Employment Service.

2. Only those women should be selected for work on farms who are able to make a substantial contribution to production. Physical fitness for the job, training, and experience should be the determining factors in selecting prospective workers.
3. Such working and living conditions as experience has proved are essential to maximum production and the maintenance of health should be provided. Under no circumstance should the use of women be permitted to lower existing standards of wages and working conditions.¹

Recruiting Women Workers for Agricultural Employment

Use of women in local communities.

Recruiting of women for work on the farm should be limited as far as possible to those communities in which an anticipated shortage of farm labor has been definitely established. Farmers' requirements for additional workers are often sporadic, uncertain, depending on weather conditions, and for frequent but short periods of time. If the women needed for farm work can be secured from the immediate vicinity, the perplexing problems of transportation and housing can be reduced or entirely eliminated. In this period of national strain every effort should be made to avoid the creation of new problems in the efforts to solve existing difficulties. Therefore, only when a survey of the local supply of labor, including available women, shows such supply to be wholly inadequate, should the bringing in of women from remote areas be considered.

Determination of the need for women workers.

Two United States Government agencies—the Department of Agriculture and the Employment Service—are making systematic and continuous surveys to determine the local needs for farm labor. The farm placement division of the Employment Service, which has 1,500 full-time and 3,000 part-time offices, is especially concerned with securing estimates of the number of men and women who may be needed

¹ The Children's Bureau, U. S. Department of Labor, has issued a statement of Policies on Recruitment of Young Workers for Wartime Agriculture.

in each farm area. In every State and in every county in the United States there is an agricultural war board, made up of representatives of each agency of the Department of Agriculture. One of the purposes of these boards, known as the United States Department of Agriculture War Boards, is to see that coordinated action is taken to meet the farmers' need for labor.

No plan to organize women volunteers for farm work in any community should be undertaken until the local representatives of both these official agencies have been consulted concerning the need for women workers on local or neighboring farms. A great deal of wasteful effort may be avoided if this policy is closely adhered to. The recruiting of people for jobs that do not exist lowers morale and increases the difficulty of securing volunteers when the real need for their services does arise.

Recruiting.

When the necessity for recruiting women in certain areas has been determined by official agencies, the registration of women for farm work should be done under the direction of or in cooperation with State and local farm placement offices of the United States Employment Service. This policy is necessary if confusion and duplication in registration is to be avoided. Volunteers may be of assistance in this work, but their efforts should be channeled through Employment Service offices, which are experienced in the task of registering large numbers of job applicants. It is even more necessary that all classifications of registration, and referrals and placements, be made by the public employment offices.

Placement of women on farms.

As confusion in registration of women for farm work can be avoided if one central agency is utilized for registration, so speed and economy in supplying farmers with labor can be accomplished if placements are made through the farm placement offices established by the Employment Service for this purpose. These offices serve as clearing houses for farmers who need labor and workers who are available for farm employment.

Every woman who is willing and qualified to do the kind of work for which farmers will require help should apply for employment at the nearest farm placement office. As already stated, there are 1,500 full-time and 3,000 part-time offices of this kind in the country. Through a personal visit or a letter to one of these offices women can secure the information they require about opportunities for farm employment. Trained interviewers, who understand the requirements of each job and the amount of skill and experience necessary, will refer women applicants to the types of job for which they are best qualified. Thus much unnecessary personal interviewing of farmers and "shopping around" for appropriate work can be avoided by women willing to do farm work. Should there be no employment office in a given locality, information concerning the local need for farm labor can be secured from the county agricultural war board.

Physical examinations.

Much of the work for which farmers may need help doubtless will be heavy work, most of which probably will have to be performed under a hot sun. To avoid serious physical consequences of work for which some women may be unfitted, physical examination should be required of all women before placements are made. The experience of the United States and Great Britain during the first World War and Great Britain's experience in the present war confirm the wisdom of this policy. Not only would the farmer and the individual woman benefit by such a requirement, but groups of workers would be protected against the spread of illnesses and contagious diseases.

Standards of Employment of Women Workers

If the war is to be won, many unusual sacrifices will be required of the workers who make materials and equipment, as well as of men in the armed forces. Experience has taught, however, that if production is to be maintained, certain standards of employment must be observed. Conditions that undermine the health of workers, cause excessive labor turnover, or reduce morale tend to cut down production. At a

time when labor is scarce, and many workers unaccustomed to the demands of the farm must be used to harvest the Nation's food supply, every effort should be made to increase production through the maintenance of those standards of work which experience has shown tend to increase output. The Employment Service can be of great assistance to a community by furnishing to farmers and workers information concerning wages and working conditions that have proved effective in stimulating production.

Hours.

Uncertain weather conditions that control much of the work of the farm make irregularity of hours frequent and often unavoidable. Nevertheless, in agriculture as in industry, long hours over a considerable period of time result in reduced production. This is especially true of repetitive and monotonous work, like planting, hoeing, and picking, that requires stooping or reaching—the kind of work for which women may be employed in agriculture in the largest numbers.

Eight hours a day and 48 hours a week have become the accepted standards for women in most occupations. On farms women should not be employed for longer hours except in emergencies, when the crop must be worked on immediately in order to prevent its loss. When emergencies require overtime for several days, compensating time off should be allowed during the same or the following week to assure full recuperation from the unusual physical strain.

Day of rest.

One day of rest in seven should be universally observed for all women engaged in agriculture. Science and experience have proved that one day off the job each week helps to keep the workers physically fit, with the result that output is increased.

Wages.

Because of their eagerness to serve their country, some women may be willing to work on farms during the war crisis for little or no pay. Though the motive is generous, the effects of such a practice would be wholly unsound socially.

Millions of men and women in peace times as well as in time of war must earn their living by working for wages on the Nation's farms. Many of these workers find existence at present wage levels exceedingly difficult. Should women offer to work for less, they would serve only to undercut existing rates and aggravate an already serious social problem.

In this country we do not have a National minimum-wage law, as Great Britain has, for farm workers. Some of the State minimum-wage laws for women permit the fixing of rates for women in agriculture, but thus far no wage order for this class of workers has been issued.

Voluntary wage standards, however, should be maintained for all farm workers. The Federal Fair Labor Standards Act serves as a guide as to what the minimum-wage standards for women in agriculture might be. Under the Federal law men and women employed in interstate industries must be paid at least 30 cents an hour. Most canneries, as well as other manufacturing establishments, are covered by this act. In many areas the same workers are employed alternately on the farms and in neighboring canneries. As the crops ripen, the workers follow them from fields to canning factories to help in their preserving. If farmers are to attract a sufficient number of workers to harvest this year's crops they must pay wages comparable to those that workers can get in canneries and other industries.

In communities in which fair wage standards are adopted by voluntary agreement, public employment offices can help by informing employers and workers of the recommended rates.

Transportation.

Transportation may be a serious problem in the effort to supply the farm with adequate labor this season. Even where the women who may be used on the farms can be secured from places no more remote than neighboring towns and villages, still some transportation will be necessary. In many cases farmers will be obliged to provide the means of getting women to and from their homes in order to secure their services. It is possible that in some communities school buses may be

used to pick up the workers in the morning and to return them to their homes at night. Because of the shortage of rubber tires, transportation this year becomes an important condition of employment, which must be met if women are to be used to any extent on farms.

Housing.

Because of the transportation problem some farmers may prefer or find it necessary to employ workers who will be willing to live on the farms or in quarters that the neighborhood may be able to provide. This situation may create many perplexing questions concerning the maintenance of proper housing standards.

When only one or two women are employed, it may be possible to accommodate them in the farmer's own home. The problem becomes more serious, however, where larger numbers of women are required and living quarters must be provided for a relatively long time. Temporary buildings or tents may be provided by farmers; the dormitories of neighboring private schools or the facilities of consolidated schools may be utilized; or camps built from public funds may be a possibility.

Wherever housing is provided for groups of workers, certain minimum standards should be observed. Frequent inspection by the proper local authorities should be made to assure that wholesome and sanitary conditions prevail. Recommended minimum standards include the following:

- a. Clean and sanitary living quarters, screened if possible.
- b. Adequate and sanitary toilet facilities.
- c. Shelters that are proof against rain and free from unwholesome dampness.
- d. Pure water for drinking and bathing, tested and certified as safe by public health authorities.
- e. Clean and comfortable beds. A single bed for each worker wherever possible.

Supervision.

If groups of young women should be employed on farms and required to live in camps or dormitories, proper supervision by qualified adult women should be provided in all cases.

Cooperation of Women's Organizations in the Solution of the Farm-Labor Problem

Many women's organizations are eager to help in solving the pending farm-labor shortage and have offered their services to State and Federal agencies. Some groups have indicated that their members will themselves be willing to work on farms if the crisis becomes so acute as to make this necessary. Organized women probably can render the greatest assistance to the "food-for-victory" drive by helping to put into operation the program outlined in the first part of this pamphlet.

Close cooperation with local farm placement offices of the Employment Service and agricultural war boards will enable women's organizations to determine how they can best serve in this emergency and whether or not a farm-labor problem actually exists in their communities.

Help in recruiting.

If women are to be needed to work on neighboring farms, local women's organizations can be of help in recruiting women for this work. They can arrange for meetings at which representatives of the Employment Service offices can explain the farm program as it relates to women. Announcements prepared by the Employment Service can be carried in club periodicals. If in some localities the necessity becomes urgent, many women doubtless would be willing to participate in a house-to-house canvass or telephone campaign to inform women of the need for their services and to urge them to register at the nearest public employment office.

Training.

In some communities labor may be needed for types of farm work for which few women are qualified at present either by experience or training. If men and boys are not available for these jobs, it may become necessary to train women in order to provide an adequate supply of workers. In communities where this necessity arises, representatives of women's organizations in cooperation with other groups can arrange for the establishment of short training courses. State and

local agricultural schools and colleges may be able to provide the necessary instruction if the need for such training is effectively presented to them by representative citizens of the community.

Doctor's certificate.

Because there is no legal regulation limiting the employment of women in agriculture to those who can pass an appropriate physical examination, the establishment of such a standard necessarily must be voluntary. Women's organizations will recognize more readily than some other groups the importance of safeguarding the health of women workers. The responsibility for persuading the proper authorities in the community to adopt reasonable safeguards to health should be assumed by women's organizations. In communities where free clinics have not been established, women may be able to arrange with local physicians to give physical examinations without charge to those women applicants for farm work who can not afford to pay for them.

Labor standards.

State and local committees of farmers, workers, and representatives of the public may work out together the standard wage rates that should be paid to farm laborers and the length of the basic workday and week in the respective communities. Either as members of these committees or as advisers to them, representatives of women's organizations can exert great influence in securing the establishment and maintenance of proper working conditions for women.

Transportation.

In communities where a serious labor shortage may be accentuated by a shortage of transportation facilities, members of women's organizations can be of material help. Many women may be willing to use their own cars to transport workers to and from farms on which they are employed. The entire neighborhood could be canvassed by women and a corps of volunteer motorists willing to furnish transportation in emergencies could be organized. Even where school buses may provide adequate transportation, arrangements must be

made with local authorities for their use. Responsibility for arranging for this means of transportation could be taken by women's organizations.

Housing.

In the matter of housing, women's organizations have a grave responsibility. It is of the utmost importance that the women and young people who respond to the country's urgent call for help in harvesting the Nation's crops be furnished suitable places in which to live. Not only must the living quarters be sanitary and comfortable, but a wholesome social atmosphere must be assured.

If women in the farm communities would open their homes to the young workers and the women who come into their neighborhood to do farm work, they would render a most patriotic service. Many of these new workers may be leaving their own homes for the first time and entering an environment with which they are entirely unfamiliar. The success with which they adjust to the new jobs will depend not alone on the conditions under which they work but very largely on the conditions under which they live. The friendly atmosphere of a private home to which workers could return from work in the evening would help them make the necessary adjustment. Women with a sympathetic understanding of the problem could without doubt persuade many householders in the neighborhood to offer temporary homes to newcomers working on nearby farms.

In some cases an uninhabited house, subjected to a thorough cleaning and provided with a few simple furnishings through the cooperative efforts of the women of the community, might be the answer to the local housing problem.

Where the resources of the community fail to yield any adequate solution for the problem of sheltering nonresident farm laborers, outside assistance may be necessary. The Farm Security Administration of the United States Department of Agriculture has had much experience in building farm-labor camps throughout the country. Public money allocated for this purpose is extremely limited, and the demands for Farm Security labor camps by the local communities are many.

However, where an urgent need for such assistance actually exists, and the community decides to ask for Federal aid, women's organizations in cooperation with other civic groups may succeed in securing the desired housing project.

Groups of young people living together in dormitories or camps must have the protection of intelligent supervision. Members of women's organizations who have had broad experience with young people would make welcome volunteers in many farm communities this summer. Mothers whose children are grown, teachers or camp counselors who are willing to forego part of their summer vacations in order to help with the "food-for-victory" program, would make excellent housemothers or supervisors in farm-labor camps where young people may be housed. Women's groups which could provide capable women willing to assume these duties would be making a real contribution.

Inspection of camps and hostels to assure that the general welfare of women and young people living in them is properly protected must in most communities be the responsibility of volunteers. Few if any States provide for public supervision of this kind. Again women's organizations doubtless will be called on to provide personnel or furnish advice concerning standards of supervision.

Community cooperation.

In areas where substantial numbers of women must be employed to meet the farm-labor shortage, careful community planning will be necessary in order that women may be employed most efficiently. Local agricultural war boards probably will be responsible for surveying the needs and resources of a locality and for securing the cooperation of women's and other civic groups in carrying out a constructive program. Committees on housing, transportation, or training may be necessary, or individual organizations may be asked to assume responsibility for putting into effect certain phases of the farm-labor program. Overlapping and duplication of effort can be avoided, and greater efficiency in solving the farm-labor problem may be attained, if each community organizes its resources and systematically allocates the tasks that must be done.