

Farmworkers Strike 1971

1971/04/11 - Leaders of a two-week old farm labor strike near Imperial Beach say they will lift their curtain of silence at a press conference Tuesday morning. This will be the first official statement by representatives of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC) who have been at the Egger and Ghio Co. 19th St. north of Palm Ave. since the dispute began. The strike started when 12 men of a 116-man work force were either fired or laid off, depending on whose version of events is accepted. (Chula Vista Star-News Apr. 11, 1971)

1971/04/11 - Chula Vista farming firm files counter suit against UFWOC. The second suit in San Diego County in less than two weeks involving the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, the union headed by Cesar Chavez, was filed Friday in Superior Court. Egger and Ghio Co., Inc., of Chula Vista, is asking for damages in the action, charging that mass picketing by union members that started Tuesday is blocking to its fields. The suit alleges that employees working in fields south of Chula Vista, at Hollister Street and Palm Avenue, were threatened with bodily harm by union members if they entered the fields. The suit claims the strike, begun March 26, endangers a crop worth \$250,000, to be harvested in June. Damages of that amount, plus general damages of \$100,000 are being sought. An injunction is also asked to stop the mass picketing. Defendants are the UFWOC and Margo Cowan, an organizer. The first suit was filed by the union committee against Egger and Ghio Co., Inc. This action charges the company with firing 13 employees because they wore UFWOC buttons to work. It asks for \$10,000 damages for each employee, plus lost wages. Plaintiffs in that action were Margo Cowan, the organizer, and Jose Robago Sanchez, Jose Capestrano, Antonio Jose Echeverria, Jose Alvarez, Guillermo Beltran, Antonio Bravo Santillan, Francisco Onteviros Munoz, Evaristo Preciado, Juan Herrera, Manuel Pichardo Rodriguez. (The Chula Vista Star-News April 11, 1971)

1971/04/15 - The Egger-Ghio strike began March 26 when 12 men of a 116-man work force were either fired or laid off, depending on whose version of events is accepted. At any rate, the entire work force is off the job and remains on the site and has stayed at the scene helping an informal picketing group every day from 8:00 am to 4:40 pm. Sources close to the workers say the 12 were fired because they wore buttons to work bearing the slogan "Viva La Cause" (long live the cause), made by UFWOC and other Chicano activist groups. Presumably the wearing of the buttons may have been interpreted by the foreman as a declaration of intent to strike, but a prominent local supporter of the strikers denies this is so. "Everybody wears those buttons. It shows we are together as a people," he states. Although UFWOC has still made no official statement, the workers are said to be asking that they be rehired and paid back wages, and UFWOC be recognized as their bargaining agent. Robert Egger, co-owner of the farm, Tuesday reaffirmed a previous statement of position made by Emil Ghio, his partner. He said the 12 workers were not fired or laid off because of lack of orders for lettuce and that lettuce was in short supply because of a recent freeze and prices very "cheap." When asked why a short lettuce would make prices go down instead of up, as is more normally the case, he said the scarcity of lettuce is a condition peculiar to San Diego County and does not necessarily determine market conditions. "The lettuce we have in San Diego is just a drop in the bucket," he said. Questioned further on this point, he referred the matter to Ghio, his partner. "I'm in charge of the growing and he's in charge of the marketing," he said. Egger denied his father ran into one of the strikers while causing him minor injury, as is charged by a supporter of the workers. A Star-News reporter and photographer spent two hours at the scene Tuesday morning talking to 50 workers tending plants in the fields while a roughly equal number of strikers, some carrying red UFWOC banners, yelled at the workers. The strikers were emphasizing Chicano solidarity. The workers are "green card" holders from Tijuana, part of a carefully limited number of Mexicans who are given permits to work in local fields. A strike supporter said they are being paid \$2 an hour (the strikers had been paid \$1.65), and that they are "on loan" to the farmer from another area for the duration of the strike, when they will go back to their previous jobs. The field was patrolled by two men on foot, armed with clubs and pistols, from the Locater Security Agency of San Diego. They said their job was to make sure the strikers did not trespass on the growers' property. They are on 24 hours a day and only one man works the "graveyard" shift, they said. The two men appeared not to take the strike very seriously and reflected the almost festive mood which seemed to prevail, especially when the strikers, accompanied by guitars, sang. Some read from Spanish verses in a mimeographed pamphlet. Both sides said there had been no "problem" between themselves and the strikers. But one, a Spanish speaker, said that sometimes there were some curses and obscenities mixed in with the exhortations for the workers, both men and women, to leave the fields. He said the songs contained such phrases as "join the Chicano cause," "work together" and "we are all brothers." A brief exchange between a striker and a worker was translated thusly: Striker: Why don't you support us and join us. Worker: Because I have to feed my family. Striker: You can leave any time you want. Worker: I'm not coming out. Strikers took turns yelling at workers through a bullhorn. Father Hurley, director of Ethnic relations for the Diocese of San Diego, was on the scene, but stressed he was there in a personal and not official capacity. He spoke with both sides, the strikers and Egger. "My main concern is to use my influence to get both sides to talk to each other. These people want to work and the owners want to harvest," he said. Also on the scene was Luis Natividad, a member of the County Human Relations Commission, the South Bay Neighborhood Corp. and the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA). He said he did not speak for the striking workers and was not officially representing his groups, but was there mainly to observe and to show his solidarity with the workers. Another MAPA member, Gus Getner, director of Chicano Studies at Southwestern College, was also on the scene. The group's president, Herman Baca, reported to have visited the struck field on numerous occasions. The dispute has also taken on a legal dimension with three civil actions having been filed. The most recent, filed Monday in Superior Court, on behalf of the strikers, alleges they were fired because they wore UFWOC buttons and asks that the owners be enjoined from interfering with what the strikers say are their rights under federal law. Last week the growers filed suit for \$350,000 in damages, claimed workers hired to replace strikers were threatened with bodily harm, and asked an injunction against mass picketing. A similar injunction which would have limited the number of permitted pickets to 20 was about to be handed down, but was later held invalid. About two weeks ago, UFWOC filed a suit alleging \$130,000 in damages on the grounds they lost their jobs because they wore buttons on their shirts proclaiming union membership. (The Chula Vista Star-News April 15, 1971)

1971/04/29 - Both sides in a five-week old dispute between the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC) and the Egger-Ghio ranch in Imperial County appeared to be digging in for a long struggle this week. The strikers' side has picked up momentum with a sanction vote for the strike by the UFWOC executive board, an on-site press conference by UFWOC's number two man, and a planned visit by UFWOC head Cesar Chavez Saturday. Jim Drake, executive assistant to Cesar Chavez, said during his televised remarks Tuesday that the committee sanction meant that limited union assistance would be available to the approximately 100 workers on a need basis. He said the Chavez appearance would probably be at the local UFWOC office at 314 San Ysidro Blvd., established Tuesday, but did not indicate when. "We're prepared to stay 10 years if we have to," he said. Equally determined was ranch co-owner Emil Ghio, who said, "As long as I am in business I will deal with UFWOC as a union." He declined comment on statements attributed recently to growers' representatives that local farmers might retire their land for production rather than deal with UFWOC. Ghio and union representatives differed sharply over the meaning of recent developments. For example, Margo Cowan

UFWOC organizer on the scene since the rhubarb erupted, claimed pickets had persuaded more than 60 workers to leave the field in the last week. "The get and smaller," she said, referring to the facts that: 1. Most of the regularly available workers for the Egger-Ghio operation are "green card" workers who work and live in Tijuana. 2. Federal law prohibits the use of green card workers as strikebreakers which means that the farm can use only those workers he hired before the strike was recognized April 10 by the AFL-CIO as a labor dispute. 3. Superior Court Judge Franklin B. Orfield ruled last week that the ranch must offer work to striking workers as needed on a priority basis. But Ghio doesn't see it that way. "That's a lie," he said in reference to Miss Cowan's claims concerning the number of workers deserting the fields. He did not indicate how many have left. "We've got plenty of people. In fact, all we need for right now, since we've only been working short hours," Ghio explained. The co-owner that last week's court action required him to hire the strikers on a permanent basis, but said he was only required to hire them work" before seeking other workers. He went on to say this meant that he could offer to employ a striker for a morning or two of work, and if the striker declined to be employed on that basis, he could then proceed to offer the work to a person other than the strikers. Ghio also disputed a claim by Robert Grav UFWOC that a boycott organized by the committee had effectively cut off the ranch's retail outlets. "What boycott?" asked Ghio, claiming that he had encountered difficulties marketing his products other than those associated with a general decline in the lettuce market in the past two months. (Chula Vista Star-News, 7/19/71)

1971/05/02 - An appearance by Cesar Chavez, head of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC) to rally supporters in a five week old far strike against Egger-Ghio Farms of Imperial Beach remained shrouded in secrecy yesterday. The appearance had tentatively been slated for yesterday and had been announced at a Tuesday press conference by Jim Drake, Chavez's executive assistant. But as of yesterday morning, information as to when or where the appearance would be was unavailable. UFWOC officials contacted late last week failed to return reporters' phone calls and those who answered the number of the UFWOC in San Ysidro said they did not speak English when asked about when or where Chavez would appear. Workers picketing the Egger-Ghio fields at 19th St. said they did not know when or where Chavez would appear or that he would be at a closed meeting and the press would not be invited. One source close to the UFWOC hinted the appearance would be put off until later this week. It was also rumored that Chavez would appear either at the UFWOC office in San Ysidro or in the co-owner Robert Egger's house, which has been picketed daily. Late Friday night, another source close to the workers set the time of the Chavez appearance for last night but said he had been unable to determine where. In other recent developments, the strike got AFL-CIO sanction, UFWOC attorneys filed another court action, and the strikers used their cars to block access of an insecticide spraying machine to the tomato fields on 19th st. The AFL-CIO sanction was the result of a Wednesday night vote by the county Central Labor Council, which includes all major unions except for the Teamsters. Fred Martinez, director of the AFL-CIO Human Resources Development Institute, said "the sanction means it is the council's view that it is a legitimate strike, that UFWOC is justified in its actions and they deserve our support." In practice this means that union members will be expected to honor UFWOC pickets and would be urged to voluntarily accede to UFWOC appeals not to buy Egger-Ghio products or from merchants who market them. But James Barnham, executive secretary for teamsters local 542, bargaining agent for the Egger-Ghio packing house in Nestor, said that if pickets were stationed at the packing house, his men would see that trucks went through. The strikers are still embroiled with UFWOC over representation of field workers in other parts of the state, but have thus far shown no interest in representing the Egger-Ghio workers. The UFWOC court action, filed Thursday, involves an allegation that the growers have hired five "green card" workers since the labor council recognized the existence of a labor dispute Apr. 10. Once the AFL-CIO has certified that a dispute exists, federal labor law forbids the use of the "green card" workers, a strikebreakers, who are allowed to cross the border from Tijuana to work in local fields. Egger and Ghio deny the allegation, which may be tried in Superior Court sometime this week. The insecticide blocking incident occurred Friday morning. Early in the morning Egger had the field marked with red oil drums so that trucks would not park next to the rows of tomato plants which he had planned to spray. But the strikers parked their cars between the row of drums and the field so that Egger could not get his insecticide spraying machine between the rows of plants. One striker said they were blocking access of the machine to the fields because Egger made a practice of spraying the fields while workers were in them, which he said was dangerous and illegal. Egger said spraying while workers were in the fields was not illegal and that he took adequate precautions to see that the machine would stay far enough away from workers to be sure they were not exposed. "I guess they must think this gives them another two points," he commented, indicating he might consider having the spraying done at night. "I don't know what they would say about that, but I'm sure they would find something wrong with it," he added. Lester Tachiki of the state Farm Labor Service in San Ysidro said "the 'cut and dried distance' spraying machines have to be from the field workers, but indicated that the distance must be a safe one. He added that a safe distance depends on wind conditions, humidity, and type of insecticides being used. Tachiki said he knew of no absolute prohibition against spraying of the field at the same time workers were working there, but reiterated that law required a safe distance. But workers claimed the distance typically present between the growers spraying and workers was often unsafe. (Chula Vista Star-News, May 2, 1971.)

1971/05/09 - Demonstration at border planned. A demonstration by the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, UFWOC, and its supporters is slated for tomorrow morning at the San Ysidro-Tijuana check station operated by the U.S. Immigration Service. The demonstration will be to protest alleged roughing up of UFWOC pickets who were posted at the check station early Thursday morning to protest what UFWOC considers inadequate efforts to prevent strikebreaker crossing. Since the six week strike by UFWOC against Egger-Ghio Farms in Imperial Beach was certified on April 28 by the Secretary of Labor, it is illegal to hire "green card" workers from Mexico to be hired to work in the struck fields. Both branches of the Immigration Service deployed in the area, the Border Patrol and border traffic control agents at the border check point, deny that any scuffles or confrontations took place. "That's a blatant untruth," said Richard Bachelor, chief of the San Ysidro Border Patrol Unit, who termed the allegations "another product of the active and vicious imaginations" of the UFWOC spokesmen. The accusations were also denied by Joseph Du Puis, who heads the Immigration check point at the border. He indicated that the check station had, on two consecutive mornings, been picketed by about 75 persons who stood so close to the entry point that border traffic was being blocked. Du Puis says that one of his men as demonstrators to move a short distance to the north and that they complied. Margo Cowan, who has been coordinating the UFWOC strike efforts, says only a few pickets were there. Around 5:30 a.m., she says, about eight to 10 agents came out of a gate house, formed a line, and proceeded to forcibly move the pickets. Miss Cowan says the pickets were pushed and shoved and that, although none were hurt, some were knocked down. The agents were in uniform but not wearing badges, she says. But Du Puis says that he only has about seven men on duty at the border check point during the early morning hours and that all but two of them are normally tied up with inside work. Miss Cowan says that about the same time on Friday morning the pickets were told to leave or that they would be "moved" again. Two San Diego Police patrol units were on the scene. Sgt. Earl Durham said he did not overhear any of the conversation between the immigration service agents and the pickets. He added that when he asked Miss Cowan what was going on she replied, "we're leaving" and that, within minutes, the pickets were gone. Du Puis says the same thing happened on Friday as Thursday the pickets were asked to move and they asked about UFWOC's contention that his agents are interfering with the use of "green card" workers as strikebreakers, Du Puis said, "We're doing all we can to enforce all the rules we have right down the line." He said that soon as the dispute was certified by the Secretary of Labor, his men began asking green card workers where they were headed for work. Those who said they were going to the Egger-Ghio Farms were told to bring check stubs or some other evidence that they had worked at Egger-Ghio before April 28, Du Puis said. Those who could not and those who said they were going to Egger-Ghio to look for work, according to Du Puis, were told that to work there is illegal and could result in being deported. But he said that his agents had no legal right to turn green card workers back and deprive them entry even if they suspected they were headed for Egger-Ghio. He said that would be a matter for Bachelor's Border Patrol agents, and that the check point men could only tell those with green cards that they were in a certified strike was illegal and inform them of the consequences which might result. UFWOC spokesmen say they expect a turnout of about 200 for tomorrow's demonstration. They indicate that the ranks of the strikers will be swelled by a large showing of local college students. (The Chula Vista Star-News May 9,

1971/05/09 - 'Full-fledged boycott' plans outlined by UFWOC organizer. Robert Greves, boycott organizer for the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, locked for six weeks in a strike against Egger-Ghio Farms of Chula Vista, outlined plans last week for a "full-fledged boycott" against the growers. He stressed that boycott tactics will be used only if Egger-Ghio fails to come to terms and negotiate. "We don't really want to have to do this," he said. But if the growers bargain with UFWOC, Greves says UFWOC "will use all its forces to make sure none of the products shipped from Golden West packing house (the Egger-distributing point) reach any markets anywhere. "We will follow his products to Sweden if we have to," Greves added, indicating that the UFWOC had a full boycott agent in Europe. He said that he was gearing his boycott contingency plans for the end of this month, when the Egger-Ghio tomato crop will be ready for market. For the past several weeks, Greves says, UFWOC has been tracing the Egger-Ghio marketing patterns. He explains that distributors have been contacted and asked not to accept Egger-Ghio products. Those who do not cooperate will be picketed. Greves also says any stores marketing Egger-Ghio products will also be picketed. UFWOC has been engaged in partial boycott activities against the ranch's pole beans, and has been picketing Safeway Market in Natick, which is still offering them for sale. Greves warns growers cannot succeed in evading a UFWOC boycott by trying to market their tomatoes under another label. "We have ways to find out about that," he said, noting UFWOC is familiar with evasion tactics used by growers in past boycotts. The boycott is considered to be UFWOC's strongest weapon against the grower, and has been used effectively against large growers in Delano, Salinas, and the Coachella Valley. Emil Ghio, owner of the ranch, has repeatedly denied his marketing operations are experiencing any effects from the boycott activities staged by UFWOC so far. (The Chula Vista Star-News May 9, 1971)

1971/05/09 - UFWOC suit seeks injunction, damages of San Ysidro farm. Another suit by the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee accusing a tomato grower of trying to stop unionization of field workers in San Diego County was filed Thursday in Superior Court. Tochi Hasegawa and Cozza Farms, Inc., of Dairy Road, San Ysidro, were named as defendant. The action asks a restraining order, an injunction and damages of \$10,000 for each of five workers it is charged with firing for their union activities. The workers are Miguel Gonzales, Guadalupe Gonzales, Jose Gonzales, Juan Islas Barrios and Luis Salcieda. Each of these is a plaintiff. Marge Cowan, organizer of UFWOC activities in the county, is also a plaintiff. The suit alleges that Hasegawa on April 21 told the five they were no longer needed and that his only reason for doing so was their union activities. The first suit filed by UFWOC was against Egger and Ghio Co., Inc., another firm. That suit resulted in a counter suit, and there are now three suits against the grower and three against the union. (The Chula Vista Star-News, May 23, 1971)

1971/05/17 - Chavez Effort Concentrated On South County Tomato Fields Showdown May Occur In Harvest. Strikers hope to prevent the firm from harvesting the tomato crop. An uneasy calm prevails over fields of tomatoes in south San Diego County. Pickets march daily around several of the South Bay fields, carrying signs and black banners of Cesar Chavez' United Farm Workers Organizing Committee. They have been on strike against Egger-Ghio Inc. farms for seven weeks, but had little apparent effect. The strike represents UFWOC's initial attempt to force growers in this county to sign a contract with the farm workers union. While pickets shout at them from a distance, employees of the farms, many hired as replacements the day after the dispute began, continue to care for the tomato fields. Cloudy weather has slowed the growth of the crop and delayed the spring harvest. In turn, the delay has put off the possibility of major farm labor problems in the area. "Wait until the sun comes out and they need workers to get in the crop, then you'll see the effect of the strike," said Marge Cowan, chief UFWOC organizer in the county. "They won't be able to get near the manpower they need." The strike has been recognized by the U.S. Labor Department and this recognition prevents the firm from hiring Green Card workers, legal immigrants who cross the border from Mexico to work in the fields. Jim Morehouse, manager of the state Farm Labor Bureau office in San Ysidro, estimated that between 73 and 90 per cent of the 5000 harvest workers are Green Card holders. "We have 137 workers now and an ample supply to draw from when we begin the harvest," said Emil Ghio, one of the owners of the farms. "With unemployment the way it is we aren't working getting workers." Miss Cowan said she did not know whether UFWOC would extend its strike to other growers. "Strikes aren't planned, they happen," she said. "I can't say for sure that it won't spread." The Egger-Ghio dispute began March 26 when 12 workers were fired from their jobs in the fields. The farm owners said the men were dismissed because there was no work for them. The union said they were fired because they were wearing UFWOC buttons. Superior Court Judge Orfield ruled that the firings were legal in a decision which specified the right of the workers to organize, the number of pickets the union could deploy and the number of 78 workers who walked off the job in sympathy with the 12 to be rehired on a priority basis. Ghio said he is complying with the order and giving the workers left their jobs a chance to return now for the harvest. The strikers met with organized opposition from the growers who have assured Ghio he will have their financial and otherwise, to combat the union. "We are united against them and all of the growers are determined to hold out and not sign any agreements," said a spokesman for the 52-member Chula Vista Growers Association. "Chavez' chances of succeeding are slim if we stick together. I am sure he will create problems. I think he will lose out for lack of support." The Chavez organizers have expressed interest primarily in organizing workers in row crops, especially tomatoes, and avocado growers also are vulnerable to strike activities according to James Moon, county agricultural commissioner. The tomato crop is the main crop here because of its value. In 1970 the crop was worth more than \$19 million, ranking second in value behind eggs. The tomatoes are vulnerable to work stoppage shortages because they require almost constant care and must be picked on time, Ghio said. In addition they have a long harvest season, usually extending from the end of May to December. Most of the growers in the South Bay raise tomatoes and other vegetables. Growers in the North County, as yet unaffected by UFWOC activities, raise avocados and citrus. The citrus crop, worth about \$10 million, is most vulnerable during its summer harvest season. Avocados, valued at about \$10 million in 1970, are picked all year. "Actually, a lot of our crops are vulnerable every day when you come down to it," Ghio said. "It's just that they've decided on tomatoes. Tomatoes, citrus and avocados together account for 24,000 of the 62,000 acres in the county devoted to agriculture. Ghio and the other growers are receiving support from the Associated Farmers of California, a powerful anti-labor group formed in the 1930s. The Associated Farmers recently reactivated the San Diego County division and Ed Backus, a North County grower is serving as president. He estimated the group has about 100 members so far. "The organization is concerned only with labor problems," Backus said in an interview. "The state organization provides advice and legal assistance if needed and the local division provides any financial support. Actually I don't know what Chavez is doing in this county. He doesn't have a single contract any better than the working contract and wages we are now providing." (The San Diego Union, May 17, 1971)

1971/05/20 - At the Egger-Ghio farms in Imperial Beach and Otay Mesa, where UFWOC has been striking for seven weeks, these laborers were paid \$1.60 or \$64 a week before deductions. (Now the strike-breakers are being paid \$2 an hour.) This is not much income to support the large families that they have, especially since this is only seasonal work. Now it can be argued that this is still pretty good for Mexican "green card" workers, compared to what they would get on their own side of the border. It also can be argued that, if union organizing efforts push up wages, the growers will switch to automation, so in the long run the workers will be even worse off because there will be fewer jobs. Or, it is said, the growers, their profits reduced, will simply sell the land for more subdivisions, thus there will be more undesirable development, less food, and higher food prices. . . . But we know that the sweat-shop disappeared from the American industrial scene some three or four decades ago, largely as a result of union organizational efforts and the right of workers to bargain collectively. It's high time that agricultural workers enjoyed these same rights. And we think the growers would be wise to recognize that the winds of change are blowing across their industry and that a policy of negotiation might be more fruitful than to undergo strikes, strife and boycotts. (The Chula Vista Star-News May 20, 1971)

1971/05/20 - An extension of the seven-week old farm labor strike by the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC) to farms other than the Egger-Ghio ranch will probably not come off for at least several days. It had been reported that a countywide shutdown would commence today, but UFWOC representatives have denied these reports. Former UFWOC organizer and now opponent Richard Napolitano predicts the group will wait another week or so and then strike the north area. (The Chula Vista Star-News May 20, 1971)

1971/05/20 - Editorial - Today is the day when, according to a statement attributed to a spokesman for Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC) is supposed to start a strike to shut down all San Diego County farm production. At this writing, it's questionable whether the countywide strike will actually take place. A spokesman for the spokesman (and the UFWOC people sometimes are rather elusive) says that he told her he had been misquoted by the Monopoly. But, countywide strike or not, the fact is that, there already is one seven-week-old farm strike in the South Bay and that, sooner or later, this county agricultural industry will become a major target of organizing efforts by the Chavez union. We don't like strikes because the public gets caught in the middle. Particularly, we don't like farm strikes, because food is what keeps human beings alive. Undoubtedly the \$1.60 an hour looks pretty good to a Mexican living in a Tijuana shack. And undoubtedly if farm wages are increased, growers will turn to automation. Perhaps they should. For, in the long run, we believe, it is so repugnant for any industry to wax rich on low wages paid an underclass of hapless and helpless workers, whether foreign or domestic. If collective bargaining that the vast majority of us who are reasonably well off must pay a few cents more for lettuce or tomatoes or grapes, so be it. It is bitter fruit that is eaten at the expense of exploited peons. At the Egger-Ghio farms in Imperial Beach and Otay Mesa, where UFWOC has been striking for seven weeks, these laborers were paid \$1.60 an hour - or \$64 a week before deductions. (Now the strike-breakers are being paid \$2 an hour.) This is not much income to support the large families they have, especially, since this is only seasonal work. Now it can be argued that this is still pretty good for Mexican "green card" workers, compared to what they earn on their own side of the border. It also can be argued that, if union organizing efforts push up wages, the growers will switch to automation, so in the long run workers will be even worse off because there will be fewer jobs. We claim no experience or strong convictions on the issue in the Egger-Ghio strike. It starts with 12 workers were fired because they held UFWOC membership cards (according to the union) or because they weren't needed (according to the grower). We don't know who is telling the truth. We hold no brief for all of the demands of Cesar Chavez (although we admire him as an able and charismatic leader who helped give farm laborers, and, indeed, all persons of Mexican extraction, a badly needed sense of self-worth and dignity, in a context of non-violence). We recognize that the Egger family co-owner of the farm has been a generous contributor to some community causes, particularly religious. But we know that the shop disappeared from the American industrial scene some three or four decades ago, largely as a result of union organizational efforts and the right of workers to bargain collectively. It's high time that agricultural workers enjoyed these same rights. And we think the growers would be wise to recognize that the winds of change are blowing across their industry and that the road of negotiation might be more fruitful than to undergo strikes, strife and boycotts. (Chula Vista Star-News 1971)

1971/05/27 - Area growers, UFWOC agree on Supreme Court decision. San Diego area growers and local organizers of the the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC) appear to agree on something, even if for different reasons. Both has supported a ruling Monday by the U.S. Supreme Court refusing a suit ostensibly brought on behalf of domestic farm laborers seeking the barring of Mexicans who work here on "green card" permits. There are about 7,000 green carders working on county farms. A case brought before the court by Joe Gooch and Rafael Bustamente had claimed the competition from the green carders depriving American farm workers of jobs and higher wages. But many growers have contended that there simply is not enough American farm workers available to do all of the work that needs to be done. Joe Owashi, president of the Chula Vista Growers Association, hailed the decision as "good neighbor policy and just good business. Green carders are important to a lot of industries in the county besides agriculture and the impact or closing the border to them would be tremendous," he said. Margo Cowan, local coordinator for a two-month old strike by the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee against Egger-Ghio farms of Imperial Beach and Otay Mesa, also supported the decision. She called the attempt to stop entry by the green carders "a move by the ranchers to stop unionization," Miss Cowan maintained it was difficult to organize farm workers who are American citizens because they live on or near the growers land and are relatively susceptible to intimidation and pressure tactics, "It's easy to keep people in line when they live in your camp," she said. By contrast, she said, it was relatively easy to organize green carders, both here and in Tijuana, because they are relatively free of the grower pressures. She also agreed that there was more work to be done than that which has been done by U.S. citizens only. The Supreme Court's refusal to act leaves standing as final a lower court decision which permits green carders entry and re-entry into the U.S. if they hold an alien registration card (green card) showing they have been lawfully admitted to the U.S. for permanent residence, who are returning from "temporary visit abroad." Another federal court has ruled that the green carders may not work at a farm involved in a labor dispute which has been certified by the Secretary of Labor. UFWOC charges the U.S. Immigration Service has not adequately enforced the ruling in connection with the Egger-Ghio strike, which was certified on April 28. It has been picketing the border check station for three weeks. (The Chula Vista Star-News May 27, 1971)

1971/05/27 - UFWOC Leader Hopes Public Opinion Staves off 'Delano' in South Bay. Jim Drake, number-two man in the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC) said last week he hopes the force of public opinion will prevent the Egger-Ghio strike from "developing into a long, bitter struggle like Delano," he said. Drake, executive assistant to UFWOC head Cesar Chavez, was in the San Diego area Thursday to discuss the two-month old strike with local UFWOC coordinators. He said the local strike "is beginning to look more like the six year battle we fought in Delano every day. I don't think a metropolitan area like San Diego should have this sort of thing to drag on," he said, adding that what happened in Delano was more understandable because of the conservative nature of the community. He reiterated a statement he made in an Imperial Beach press conference several weeks ago, affirming that UFWOC would fight for 10 years if it had to in order to get fair contracts with county growers. Drake was clearly miffed at reports published in a San Diego evening newspaper to the effect that UFWOC was supposed to start the Egger-Ghio strike to all the farms in the county last Thursday. "I haven't the slightest idea where they got that date or that information," he said. He did repeat an earlier statement that UFWOC would eventually extend the strike efforts to all the major county growers, but emphasized no timetable had been established. Chavez lieutenant emphasized the extension of strike activities to county ranches other than Egger-Ghio was not contingent on the course of the strike activities. Instead, Drake said, they will depend on the course of UFWOC activities in other parts of the state. The organizing committee has strike, boycott or other, action in progress in about eight other areas, he said. Asked what he thought of the progress of the local strike efforts, he responded that "experience, has taught us to be philosophical about these things." "To us, survival is victory, and we've survived, so we feel pretty good about it," he went on. He was full of praise for the courage of the strikers, some of whom he said had lost their cars and their homes due to being cut off from income and unable to make payments. "If half of our American citizens had to suffer the treatment which many of these people do and still had the guts to go on strike, we would have a pretty good country," he asserted. He said about UFWOC's running beef with the U.S. Immigration Service over admission of green card workers to work in struck fields, Drake said he doubted the law could be made to satisfactorily enforce the law. A federal court has ruled it is illegal for the Mexican work permit holders to be hired to work on a struck farm after the strike has been certified by the Secretary of Labor, which, in the case of Egger-Ghio, was on April 28. He said the reason was that the Immigration Service was not the U.S. attorney general. He added that even under Ramsey Clark, whom Drake considered the fairest enforcer of immigration laws, farm workers have never been able to match the "political clout" wielded by growers. Drake disputed statements by local growers that UFWOC contracts typically robbed growers of their own businesses. He said the contracts which UFWOC has asked growers to sign have borrowed heavily on provisions typically prevalent in industry union contracts. Drake also rejected growers' claims that UFWOC contracts imposed pesticide committees which have made decisions resulting in severe crop damage. "I don't know what they're talking about," he said, challenging growers to come up with specific instances, and that he could not see "why the growers are being so emotional about things." Drake stressed that UFWOC "is open to talks with growers about special problems or about conditions in some of our other contracts which they say they can't live with." "We have over 300 contracts, we don't bite anyone, and things like grapes, lettuce and agrobusiness in general are not going on strike," he maintained. He also disputed statements attributed to him in the San Diego press that farm labor and labor in general should be regulated solely by the Wagner Act and not be subject to restrictions imposed by the Taft-Hartley Act and the Landrum-Griffin. Drake said he had no objection to provisions in the laws guaranteeing workers rights to fair elections, secret ballots, other democratic guarantees, or provisions requiring financial disclosure to avoid corruption. He objects to, Drake explained, were provisions "which restrict the ability of unions to help each other," particularly restrictions on boycotts and secondary

While conceding it was theoretically possible for unions to get too much power, he claimed farm labor unions need a period of unrestricted growth like that by industrial unions from 1935 to 1947 when the Taft-Hartley Act was passed. "The point is simply that labor needs to be encouraged and not restricted at the time," he said. "If the steel workers and the auto workers had never had the right to use economic sanctions like the boycott to get contracts, there wouldn't be any to speak of," Drake concluded. (The Chula Vista Star-News May 27, 1971)

1971/10/14 - South Bay farm strike action seen winding down until spring. Speculation mounted this week that there will be no real action in a six-month-old labor strike until next spring. Only six pickets showed up at the truck fields of Egger-Ghio Farms in Otay Mesa Tuesday and yesterday, and there were none on Wednesday, a working day, and Monday, a holiday. The ranch is winding down its fall tomato harvest which should be complete within a month. The usual winter-spring crop has been deleted and the size of the annual winter celery crop has been reduced. Since not even the celery crop, which co-owner Emil Ghio calls "a little important to the farm's income, it appears that the next opportunity for the strikers to hit hard will be in the spring. Then major plantings of tomatoes and grapes will be done. UFWOC continues to maintain a shack and shrine near the Egger-Ghio fields near Imperial Beach where most of the large-scale picketing and demonstration took place earlier this year. The growers have complained to the city of San Diego that the buildings violate zoning and building codes, but have had no action. UFWOC admits the violation, but justified them by pointing out that the growers planted over public rights-of-way designated in a 1910 subdivision. About three weeks ago UFWOC mustered about 250 supporters, mostly college students and farm workers from other parts of the state, to march from its San Diego office to "reconsecrate" the shrine and the strike. An increase in picketing and other strike activities was expected to follow, but never materialized on a sustained basis. One day the number of the picketers climbed to 18 for a few hours, but then fell off to the usual six or eight. Instead of arriving at 8 in the morning as they usually do, they have recently been rolling in around 10 a.m., according to the growers. By contrast, UFWOC regularly mobilized from 40 to 60 pickets per day during the summer and more than 150 on two occasions last spring when they were joined by college students. UFWOC spokesmen have not been available for comment, having failed to return reporter's calls. (Chula Vista Star-News, Oct. 14, 1971)

1972/10/12 - Cesar Chavez visits Imperial Beach Methodist Church. Chavez thanked the church group for supporting the farm labor strike in Imperial Beach during the summer of 1971. He said he had been impressed with the morning's church service, which stressed the brotherhood of man. Chavez had been introduced to the group by Rev. Michael Cooney as "a man, like that man of Nazareth, who walked with the people of the land." The union leader was in San Diego making a campaign for votes against Proposition 22, the farm labor initiative on the Nov. 7 ballot. He told the church group, who gave him a standing ovation, that the proposition would "destroy our movement, to prevent us from strike or boycott." He urged a "no" vote on 22 so that the workers "could go on feeding themselves" and seeking a better life. Chavez also spoke of some of the experiences he's had in his travels around the nation, relating the spirit he had felt for the movement especially among the poor people. And he added that it is "all right to eat grapes now, but not lettuce." (Imperial Beach Star-News, Oct. 12, 1972)

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