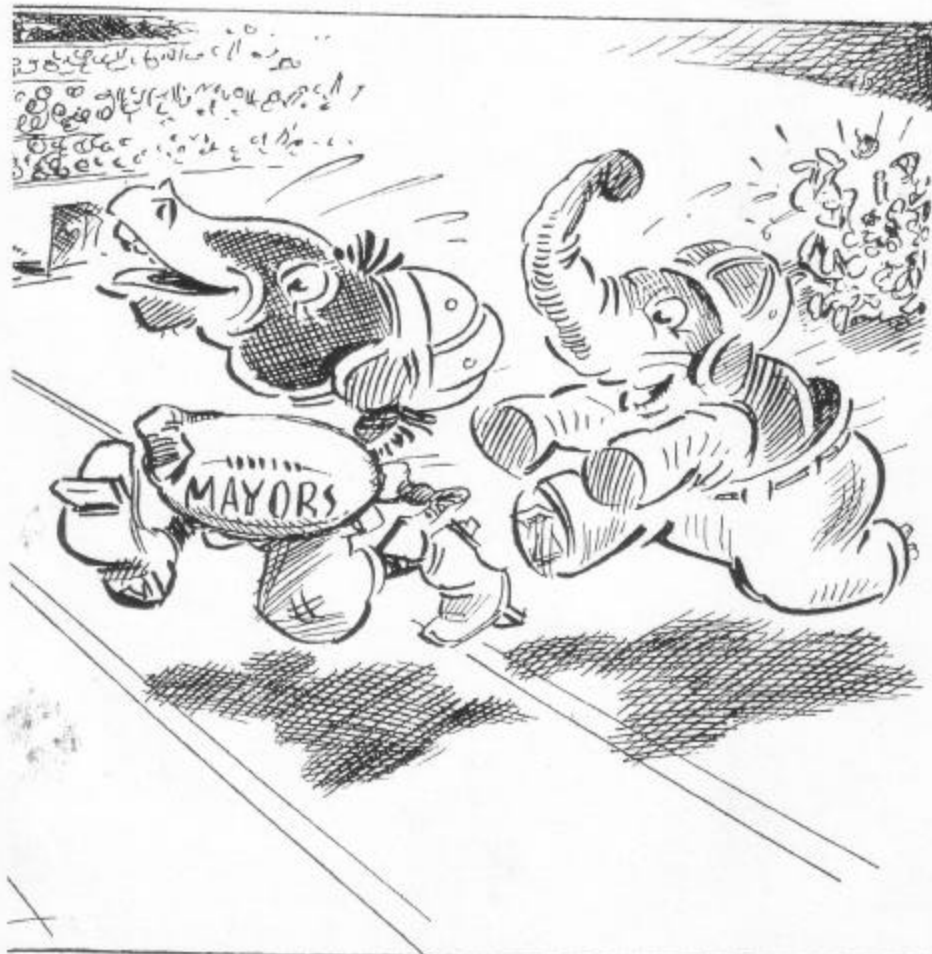


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STATE GOAL — 1946 — TOUCHDOWN OR TACKLE?

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*Lasbury
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CONNECTICUT'S TOBACCO GROWERS DID THEIR PART

By RALPH C. LASBURY

Director Shade Tobacco Growers Agricultural Association

One of the state's major cash crops—tobacco—produced here under many handicaps but growers solved many problems. Strides in mechanization of farming equalled by intelligent handling and housing of migrant employees.

One of the great wonders of the homefront battle in this war has been the production of bigger and better crops by Connecticut farmers against terrific odds.

The culture of one of the State's major cash crop, tobacco, tobacco for the production of millions of cigars that went to fighting men in all parts of the world, gives, perhaps, the finest illustration of this battle, now won.

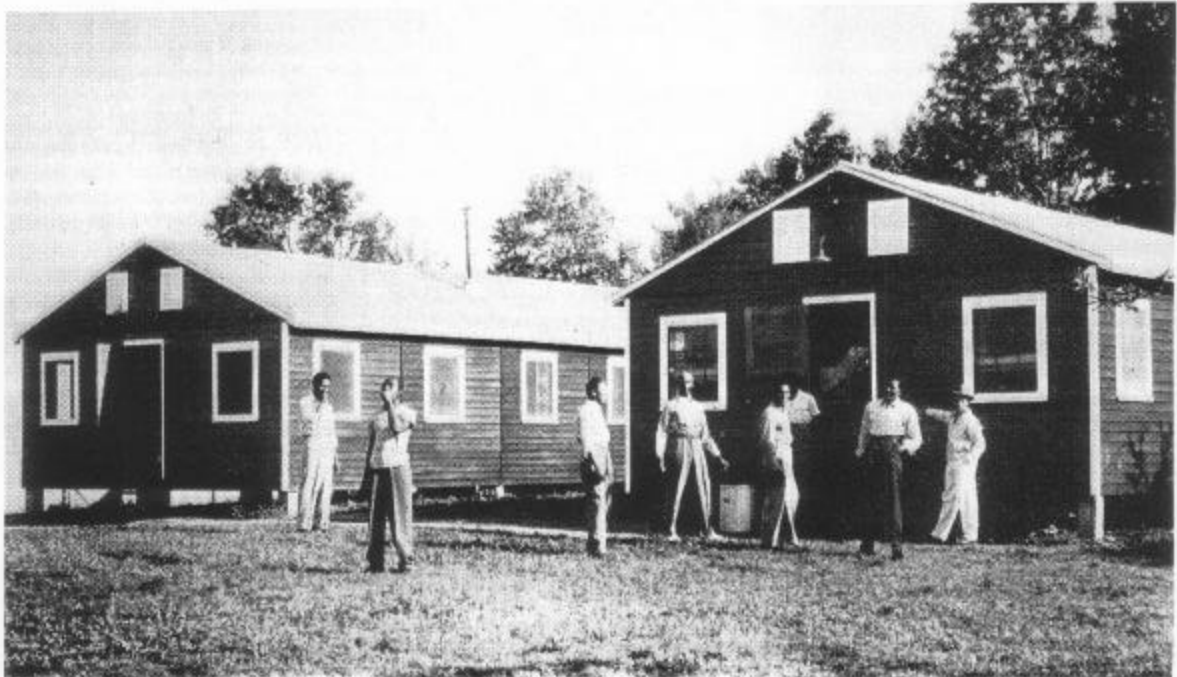
Of the many farm products raised in the Connecticut Valley, tobacco requires by far the greatest amount of hand labor despite the great strides made in the mechanization of farming thousands of broad acres whence come the finest cigar wrappers raised in America, not to mention the millions of pounds of choice filler and binder tobaccos which, though unseen, add to the taste and aroma of a good cigar.

It was a serious blow to the tobacco producers when thousands of farm workers, both on the farms and in

the cities, deserted the land for much more spectacular jobs in aircraft and gun factories—and at much higher wages. And when many young men later left the farms and also factory jobs to carry a gun for Uncle Sam and women took their places at the machines, the normal labor supply for farmers reached an all-time low.

Migratory labor was the only answer for the tobacco growers if they were to meet the increased goals set by Federal officials who sought to keep up the morale of fighting men and factory workers alike, by stepping up cigar production. How to recruit the outside workers and where were they going to live?

The government supplied the answer to the first part of that double question; the rest was up to the tobacco growers. They had been recruiting Southern Negro workers for tobacco raising in Connecticut for years, but the existing housing facilities were nowhere adequate to take care of the anticipated influx if the industry was to maintain a high level of production. Moreover, it was a doubtful venture, anyway, because there was no telling how long the war would last nor what would be the continuing need for farm labor housing the next year, or the next. That was three



Newly built dormitories provided by the General Cigar Company on its East Granby plantation for Jamaican farm workers, typical of the housing furnished some 2,000 British subjects imported to Connecticut to help produce the state's famous tobacco crop.

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5 page article (Lasbury)



A typical kitchen scene in a Jamaican farm labor camp operated by the Imperial Agricultural Corporation on the Otee Farm in Windsor. The camp was remodeled and furnished by the company.

years ago. Before the first migratory worker arrived on the scene last spring, Connecticut tobacco farmers had created, largely at their own expense, adequate, safe and sanitary housing for approximately 3,000 seasonal workers whose homes were anywhere from a dozen to several thousand miles from their place of employment.

The size of the undertaking might be compared with a war housing development erected by the Government to house in-migrant war workers. Charter Oak Terrace in Hartford, with accommodations for 1,000 families, or roughly 4,000 to 5,000 individuals, comes to mind. It cost \$4,500,000.

It is not so easy to get an accurate estimate of the cost of the migratory housing for tobacco workers. The job was done piecemeal and not collectively; individual growers undertook to care for the number of migratory workers they would hire. It was done, for the most part in rural areas, and since the housing would be idle during the winter months, construction

was not entirely of the year-around type, and thus less costly.

The Shade Tobacco Growers Agricultural Association, largest employers of out of state workers, estimates that a quarter of a million dollars would be conservative with regard to the cost to his association alone. Some money was saved because it was possible to convert at least three former Government CCC camps in the State. The estimate, incidentally, does not include the cost of these camps.

The migratory workers came from a number of sources, notably the Island of Jamaica in the British West Indies. Close to 2,000 Jamaicans helped raise the 1945 tobacco crop, forming the largest single imported group. Next comes some 1,200 high school boys and girls enrolled through the Victory Farm Volunteers from Florida, Pennsylvania and Connecticut. A third group consisted of close to 500 Southern Negro youths, mostly high school and college students.

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season, 17 such camps were operated in Connecticut and 3 in Massachusetts—15 for girls and 5 for boys.

They were located in such communities as Andover, Bolton, Buckland, Manchester, Melrose, Westfield, West Granby, East Hartland, Riverton, Tariffville, Suffield, Windsor, North Bloomfield and Popponoek.

The tobacco growers and the Extension Service saw to it that there was nothing makeshift about this housing. In the first place, the housing for the volunteer farm youths, as well as all housing for migratory labor on the farms, had to meet rigid State and local regulations with respect to sanitation, fire safety and all that these entail. The standards were part of a voluntary code entered into by the growers with various State departments, so that even where no statute existed the code was effective.

The housing was required to meet the test of inspection by the Extension Service, local or state health authorities and local or state fire marshals.

The standards, moreover, were only one aspect of a comprehensive supervisory program covering transportation, age of young workers, hours of employment and various other aspects of this particular type of employment. And despite the statements of critics who sought to clutter the lawbooks with more legislation of doubtful necessity, the self-regulatory system worked and worked to the satisfaction of the state officials.

In the case of the Victory Farm Volunteers, the housing took the form of newly built dormitories or remodeled country inns or old Colonial homesteads. In virtually every instance, they were set amid lovely rural surroundings and, as was the case with several of the so-called camps, they were on the shores of beautiful woodland lakes which gave the youthful workers a grand summer's work-vacation.

Supervision was an important factor and largely responsible for the well-managed and well-run records of the camps. Supervisors consisted, for the most part, of members of the faculties from the secondary schools attended by the workers. The general policy has been one competent supervisor for each 25 girls and one for every 35 boys. Field supervision was maintained at the same ratio, and it was not uncommon to find a group of boys and their athletic coach working side by side in the fields, and bunking together back at the camp.

Besides the comfortable quarters in the country, the housing included beds, blankets, sheets, pillows, pillow cases, toilet and washing facilities, modern refrigeration, adequate cooking and feeding facilities, electric lights, water, telephone and recreational equipment.

Housing for Jamaicans and Southern Negro workers took a different form, largely dictated by the particular tastes of these bands, especially in the case of the Jamaicans. In addition to the former CCC camps, the Government National Youth Administration building—once a Young Women's Christian Association summer

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in Rocky Hill was used. It is a substantial Georgian Colonial building, with spacious grounds for athletic purposes.

On many farms, small dormitories were erected for Jamaican workers, all substantially built with modern conveniences, separate kitchens and dining rooms.

They, too, were supplied with beds, blankets, and the rest.

Although unrelated to housing but an important factor in the contentment and satisfaction of these workers was the fact that, miles from home, a fine recreational and religious program was carried on by the Connecticut Council of Churches and financed by the tobacco growers. Although the Jamaicans were supplied with movies, reading material, religious items (they are extremely religious), sports equipment and sundry other pastimes, the desire of the Jamaicans, who have just completed their third summer of work on Connecticut tobacco and other farms, to return next year and the next is an excellent commentary on their treatment here.

It is also highly significant that throughout the migratory farm labor program there has been extremely little difficulty with the imported workers on the part of the natives in the towns in which they have spent the summer season. In fact, during the past summer, the many Farm Volunteers in Merose were hosts to a series of groups of residents who came to the camp to enjoy a typical camp dinner and an evening's social. Many of the townsfolk have been impressed by the

good manners and behavior of the youths who frequently came to town to shop in the village stores, or to enjoy a weekly movie. And not a small percentage were regularly at Sunday services in the local churches.

Among the Jamaicans and Southern Negroes, singing is a time-honored form of recreation. Many of their choral groups attended church affairs to sing spirituals and religious songs. Perhaps the most notable event in this regard is the annual sing sponsored by The Hartford Times and broadcast over a national hookup from the portico of The Times Building in Hartford.

Starting as a doubtful experiment, the farm labor program has proven highly successful and there are now some growers who wonder whether they will ever again have to depend on uncertain local labor supplies. Already, the association is gathering data on next season's migratory labor plans, although the situation is somewhat complicated by the fact that the Government's assistance may be withdrawn with the expiration of the wartime legislation which made it possible, not only in Connecticut but throughout agricultural states.

When Connecticut's war plants complete their reconversion to peace production, and factory jobs become more plentiful once more, there is every reason to believe that without migratory labor agriculture in this State will be unable to keep its wartime gains.

In that event, the Shade Tobacco Growers, for one, are prepared to house and feed and care for several thousand imported workers in clean, comfortable and modern accommodations.

Spangher (p. 5)

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