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 tobacco acres where once 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
A typical kitchen scene in a Jamaican farm labor camp operated by the Imperial Agricultural Corporation on the Ques 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 4,000 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 $5,500,000.

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 come 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 of the 5,200 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. (Continued on page 31)
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 North Haven, Mystic, Manchester, Wallingford, Westfield, West Granby, East Hartford, Riverton, Tariffville, Suffield, Windsor, North Bloomfield and Pocono Road.

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 farms 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 faculty 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, towels, pillows, pillowcases, toilet and washing facilities, modern refrigeration, adequate cooking and feeding facilities, electric lights, water, telephone and recreational equipment.

Housing for Jamacans and Southern Negro workers took a different form, largely dictated by the particular tastes of these hands, especially in the case of the Jamacans. In addition to the former CCC camps, the Government National Youth Administration building—once a Young Women's Christian Association summer...
Connecticut Growers Did Their Part, Ralph C Lasbury