

Appendix 2

INDIGENOUS OAXACAN MIGRANTS IN CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURE: A NEW CYCLE OF POVERTY

A REQUEST FOR SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING TO THE RURAL ECONOMIC POLICY PROGRAM OF THE ASPEN INSTITUTE AND THE FORD FOUNDATION

by

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Amount Requested: \$22,000

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BACKGROUND

Since the deepening of Mexico's economic crisis in the early 1980s, indigenous peasants from the state of Oaxaca (and other highland areas of southern Mexico and Central America), have migrated to the United States in increasing numbers. This accelerating flow of indigenous peoples has altered the character of unauthorized migration from the southern border, and presents a series of public policy challenges for the near future. These new migrants are among the most impoverished workers in the United States today, reproducing the relative poverty they experience in Mexico.

Compared with the Mexican migrants from the traditional sending regions of Mexico, who generally have much more collective experience adapting to life in California, the new indigenous migrants are arriving with greater handicaps: many speak little or no Spanish (much less English); they are often in desperate economic circumstances; and they are subject to racism even from other Mexican-born workers, because of their distinctive culture, language, and appearance. These communication problems, cultural barriers, and discrimination have also made it extremely difficult for indigenous immigrants to access U.S. government services to which they are entitled.

Our research has focussed on Mixtec farm workers in California and Oregon, who constitute one of the poorest groups of these new immigrants (although the Triquis appear to face even greater difficulties, as do the Guatemalans). We have carried out an exploratory survey of the Mixtec, working with the few self-help organizations they have formed in California. In the process we have come to recognize the importance of mapping the population of indigenous migrants, both to assist the indigenous organizations as well as to enable us to have an impact with policy makers and service providers in different regions when we present the results of the study.

For example, we helped to organize a conference about the Oaxacan migrants in Madera, California, in mid-1990, which was sponsored by the local Cooperative Extension office. The conference was heavily attended by local bilingual school teachers and other service providers. The numbers of Mixtec families in the town had become so large that everyone recognized the importance of the issue, however no one was able to estimate the size of the population, to identify all the villages of origin and their characteristics, or to discuss the dispersion of the population in other California towns. This problem is certain to repeat itself in the future in every attempt to discuss the Oaxacan migrants with government officials and other social service providers.

In addition, the Oaxacan farm workers often suffer from the worst abuses of labor laws in California. Since enforcement of such laws is based on complaints, and since there are only a handful of enforcement officers, it is imperative that the workers are in contact with organizations which they trust and which can act to represent their interests. The Mixtec self-help organizations in Vista, Arvin, Fresno, Madera, and Livingston, California, have demonstrated the ability to function in this manner, given adequate support. We are proposing to work with these organizations to identify the populations of indigenous migrants, and to develop an informational campaign to make the workers aware of their rights as laborers in the United States. This should assist in the building of the organizations as well.

WORK COMPLETED TO DATE

In the original work plan, we assumed that we would start by locating Mixtec migrants throughout California, using a variety of sources, and that this would allow us to make a population estimate and mapping. In practice, we discovered that this was not feasible: the International Labor Organization survey from Oaxaca did not have good destination data; the Mixtec self-help organizations operating in California were few and had limited knowledge of indigenous migrants from other villages; Mixtec migrants interviewed at the border were unable to estimate the numbers of people from their villages in the United States; and the service-providing organizations in California proved to be completely unaware that this group of migrants existed.

We therefore decided to move directly to a survey of Mixtec farm workers, which we began in Oregon in the spring of 1990 and which has continued in Fresno county, in central California. These detailed surveys contain extensive data on work histories and the location of family members. This data can now provide the basis for the "census" of Oaxacan migrants which we originally envisioned as an important element of the study.

We have made a considerable amount of progress in understanding Mixtec migration to the United States, in working with the Mixtec self-help organizations, and in framing a report for the Rural Economic Policy Program. Among the accomplishments to date:

I. We are finishing up our survey of farm workers in the Fresno area. Approximately 125 Mixtec farm workers have been surveyed at length thus far, with another 50 partial surveys that were conducted at various points. We expect to complete at least 150 full surveys. A few of the surveys were carried out in Oregon, and a CIRS contract with the Commission on Agricultural Workers will allow us to interview some workers in San Diego. A data base has been constructed and the questionnaires are currently being coded and entered. This work has also generated voluminous amounts of ethnographic detail on villages, settlements, contractors, and other topics.

II. We held a conference in January 1990 at the University of California at San Diego, in cooperation with UC-MEXUS and the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies. This conference was notable for its dialogue among Mixtec representatives, academics from both the United States and Mexico, and officials of the Mexican government. The conference led to greater assistance for the Mixtec self-help organizations in fund raising, which has in turn helped those organizations to continue to function. It also produced commitments from various participants to train translators for court hearings, to assist in a variety of educational and social service efforts, and to build a larger network of research and support. A bulletin will be issued periodically (see attached) and a transcript of the conference has been edited by Carol Zabin and will be published by the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies in the near future.

III. A variety of projects have evolved in cooperation with the Mixtec migrant groups. For example:

A. Patricia Harrison, a professor at the University of California at Davis, has developed a proposal for co-housing projects in cooperation with one of the Mixtec organizations. We are currently discussing the manner in which such projects could be funded.

B. The Comite Civico Popular has secured sufficient funding to open an office in north San Diego county. We are currently cooperating with the American Friends Service Committee to supplement this with a full-time staff person to interface between the farm workers and the broader community.

C. We have developed a proposal for a pilot project to train lay health advisors among the women in the Mixtec settlements. This would be carried out in cooperation with the self-help groups.

IV. An outline of our report for the REPP has been developed. Extensive oral histories have been taken of the self-help groups, Carol Zabin has completed a draft overview paper on labor market issues, and Michael Kearney has written considerable material on cultural issues.

We have thus made considerable progress in the research, with additional benefits to the community that were not included in the original proposal. This additional community work has cost time and money and left us unable to support a broad census and mapping of the population, especially since the methods we had planned to use proved inadequate.

PROPOSED SUPPLEMENTARY PROJECT

In the original conception of this research project on Mixtec farm workers, we expected to be able to estimate the numbers of indigenous immigrants through our surveys, even if other methods failed, as noted above. However, it turned out that the workers themselves did not

know how many fellow migrants were in a given place, although they did know the locations of concentrations of migrants. Thus our initial farm worker survey has generated a relatively good frame of destination points, but only vague estimates of how many indigenous migrants might actually live or work there.

Because we believe that an estimate of the population of such migrants, and its rate of growth, will be important for public policy discussions, we are proposing to carry out an intensive "census" of indigenous migrant concentrations in California (and perhaps Oregon) in the summer of 1991. We are further proposing to conduct this research as a participatory project, where we employ Mixtec leaders along with anthropologists to visit the communities, both to estimate the population and to conduct a modest educational campaign about labor laws in the United States.

FLOW OF WORK (3 months)

I. Preparation (3 weeks)

1. Analyze farm worker survey data to create a list of locations where Mixtecs are found in California, including an analysis of seasonality of migration, crops worked, and expected location in the summer.
2. Analyze migrant education student tracking system data to supplement frame. We have reviewed this data for Oregon, and it is highly uneven in its specificity of place of origin.
3. Compile list of local resource people and key informants in each area, such as educators, social service providers, migrant advocates, and California Rural Legal Assistance community workers.
4. Analyze Mexican population census data in cooperation with University of California at Riverside group to distinguish indigenous communities in Mexico, which will provide the universe of origin. This may help to identify indigenous migrants who do not want to admit to speaking a language other than Spanish, a problem we encountered with some workers from the state of Guerrero.
5. Prepare short questionnaire about community of origin to be administered to key informants. This data will be used to help to create a typology of sending communities.
6. Prepare informational packets on labor laws and other social services tailored for use in local areas. These will be distributed to farm workers in the course of the project. We expect to use already available materials from the labor commissioner, the Mexican consul, and other sources, but we may

prepare a special issue of the CIRS spanish-language newspaper **Semilla** which would contain much of the general information.

7. Interview project candidates nominated by Mixtec organizations, selecting two or more, perhaps to work in staggered periods in different areas. The Mixtec organizations with which we are cooperating are the **Comite Civico Popular Mixteco**, the **Asociacion Civica Benito Juarez**, and the **Organizacion del Pueblo Oprimido y Explotado**.

8. Train teams to do labor education and census estimates.

II. Implementation (5 weeks)

1. Schedule site visits
2. Gather background data from key informants
3. Visit camps and other gathering points for Mixtecos
4. Conduct community surveys, make population estimates, carry out labor education and distribute materials

III. Analysis (1 month)

1. Analyze data from community surveys, informant interviews
2. Create mapping of migration flows with population estimates, seasonal variations, and places of origin
3. Write up results.

IV. Follow-up on labor education

The Mixtec organizations will be responsible for following up on these contacts.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

This supplemental grant will enable us to complete the study as originally planned, but with a much more extensive mapping and estimation of the populations of indigenous immigrants in California. It will provide a model to carry out similar efforts in other parts of the country. It will also allow the Oaxacan self-help organizations in California to come into contact with other concentrations of indigenous migrants, as the project will be pursued as a participatory effort. Finally, it will provide education on labor laws to recent immigrant farm workers.

BUDGET

Salaries, taxes, benefits

Carol Zabin	employee for 3 months	7,675
Res. Asst.	contract for 2 months	3,600
Mixtecs (2)	contract for 1.5 months	4,800

Field expenses

Travel, food, lodging	2,000
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Office expenses

Phone, xerox, mail, office supplies	625
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SUBTOTAL	18,700
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CIRS indirect costs	3,300
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TOTAL	22,000
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