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## **Interview no. 1559**

David F. Herrera

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## THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: David F. Herrera

Interviewer: Beth Morgan

Project: Bracero Oral History Project

Location: Mesquite, New Mexico

Date of Interview: April 7, 2003

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Transcript No.: 1559

Transcriber: Vanessa Macias

David F. Herrera was born in 1925, and soon after, his family moved to Mesquite, New Mexico; he went through two years of college at New Mexico State University, where he focused on civil engineering; shortly thereafter, he followed in his father's footsteps and began farming; he began hiring braceros to help him on the farm in the mid 1950s. Mr. Herrera recalls that in 1946, after attending New Mexico State University for two years, he began farming in Mesquite, New Mexico, with only twelve acres of land; gradually, he acquired more land, and in the mid 1950s he began hiring braceros; with the help of his friends he would pick the braceros up at *Rio Vista*, a processing center in Socorro, Texas; the braceros primarily helped him with the cotton harvest beginning in late August and continuing through February; he would hire twenty braceros for the harvest; the workers were housed in renovated adobe buildings with electricity and running water; they would often walk to nearby stores to buy necessities or would wait until the weekends to go to Anthony or Las Cruces, New Mexico; he would furnish the braceros with the bags they needed to pick cotton; oftentimes, he and a neighbor would share braceros as necessary for finishing work; in his opinion, it was pressure from the labor unions that ultimately caused the demise of the Bracero Program.

**Name of Interviewee:** David Herrera

**Date of Interview:** April 7, 2003

**Name of Interviewer:** Beth Morgan

This is Beth Morgan. It's April 7, 2003 and I am visiting with David Herrera at his home in Mesquite, New Mexico. This interview is for the Bracero Oral History Project. (Muffled) So now you should be able to hear it. It's better when you're talking also. So, if I could ask you, Mr. Herrera, when and where were you born?

DH: I was born in Rosito, New Mexico about four miles from Mesquite in April 2, 1925.

BM: Okay, your full name is...what?

DH: My phone number?

BM: Full name.

DH: Full name is David Frank, David F. Herrera, I'll just use the initials.

BM: Okay, where did you grow up and go to school, Mr. Herrera?

DH: I grew up in SOMETHING from Mesquite. I'd gone to Mesquite Elementary and then I went to Anthony Union High School. I attended two years at New Mexico State University. It was New Mexico A&M at that time.

BM: Did you graduate from NMSU then?

DH: No, I just went there two years?

BM: And what did you study there?

DH: Civil engineering.

BM: Were your parents farmers?

DH: Yes.

BM: That was in the Mesquite area?

DH: Yes.

BM: Okay, what did they raise?

DH: At that time, when I was growing up, the main crop was cotton and alfalfa. Now, the farming the way it is diversify many of their crops.

BM: What was your father's name?

DH: Carlito V. Herrera.

BM: And you stayed with an F, right?

DH: Yes.

BM: Okay, now he farms here in this area also?

DH: Yes. My folks moved to this area when I was less than a year old. He had a farm west of the town here and that's where the farm was.

BM: Okay. When did you start farming yourself?

DH: Well, actually I started farming in 1946. Two years after I got out of high school. I became a college drop out to become a farmer.

BM: And was it something that you did by choice? Or did you need to help your family?

DH: No, farming was always in my blood. I started farming a small patch of land shortly after that. At that time, timing was, you could make a real good living on farming. The costs were low, the price of crops were almost the same as they are now.

BM: When you began farming, was it your father's property or did you buy your own place?

DH: I bought a small acreage. I started farming pieces of it. I kept on farming, I would leave some ground, and then I started buying SOMETHING acreage.

BM: Was that also here in this area?

DH: In the surrounding area. I started farming, a farm came up for sale that was within my area where I could farm and if I had any trouble with farm equipment any distance, SOMETHING.

BM: How many acres did you start with, if you don't mind me asking? (phone rings) Should I stop this?

DH: Let me see if my wife... (TAPE INTERRUPTION/STOPS)

BM: Okay, now where were we? I think we had just gotten to the point where I asked you how many acres you started with. You said you had begun with twelve acres and before that, you said that whenever there was acreage that was in the area, then you would try to acquire it. When was it that you began using Braceros?

DH: I don't remember when that started, but when it started, I was growing cotton and there was no mechanical cotton pickers at that time. It was all hand-picked cotton. So, I started contracting Braceros.

BM: I believe the program started around 1942, so...

DH: It wasn't that early, I wasn't farming at that time. How long did it last?

BM: Through 1964.

DH: To 1964? Okay, probably started contracting Braceros in the mid 50's.

BM: Alright, that would put us in the middle of the program. How did you find out about these Bracero programs?

DH: It was pretty well advertised. Farm Bureau put out a lot of information on it. I had a friend who was running the program. SOMETHING Apodaca. He was a graduate of New Mexico State and he was in charge of the program for this area. Processing base at that time was Rio Vista, below El Paso. That's where we went to arrange the put the Braceros here in the SOMETHING basin. A little farther SOMETHING.

BM: Now, you say Mr. Apodaca was in charge of the program? Was he the labor director for the Farm Bureau?

DH: I'm not too sure how he was connected or who was his supervisor.

BM: Is he still in this area?

DH: He passed away. He passed away about 10 years ago.

BM: Did you actually go down to Rio to choose the workers that you wanted?

DH: We didn't get a chance to choose our workers, but the way that this was handled, they would decide if you were granted fifteen Braceros, they would pick out fifteen Braceros and turn them over to you. This area, all the farmers, were trying to get people from La Luna area in Mexico. That's where the good cotton pickers came from. Cotton grows really well there. We would go early and try to move around with the Braceros that were available and find out a little about themselves. When it came time for us to pick the Braceros, we would tell them to get in a certain line and they would have a little better chance of getting those Braceros.

BM: I see. So, that was because they also grew cotton in that area? Of Mexico?

DH: There were those who were familiar with Mission Valley and they liked this area real well.

BM: Whereabouts is La Luna?

DH: I never did find out, but they called it La Luna OR La Laguna area. I'm not familiar with that part of SOMETHING. But that's where those cotton pickers, there were many of them that would pick 500 pounds a day. They could pick that pretty easy.

BM: Is that a lot?

DH: Oh yeah. The average cotton picker would pick about 200 pounds.

BM: I see, well that's a lot then. What did you have to do to hire Braceros? Was there paperwork?

DH: Oh, yes, uh-huh. Yeah, we had to apply and that's where Mr. Apodaca came in. He processed all the paperwork that we requested from different farmers for different Braceros.

BM: Did you have to go somewhere to do that, or did they come to you?

DH: Mr. Apodaca had an office here in Las Cruces. The processing center was in Rio Vista in lower El Paso.

BM: Where was the office that you had to go to in Las Cruces, do you remember?

DH: If I wasn't mistaken, it was the Farm Bureau office.

BM: Okay, that would make that, I don't know who the various directors were at that time. I talked to a Bob Porter, do you know him?

DH: Oh yes.

BM: He was the labor director, but only for a couple of years.

DH: Bobby Jack Porter?

BM: Yeah.

DH: He used to be originally from Hatch. I know a Bob real well. You know, when we were kids, we used to get in a lot of 4-H clubs. One year, I was awarded an all expense paid trip to Chicago from this SOMETHING. Bobby Porter was awarded one from the Hatch area. But we were twelve, thirteen years at that time. (laughs)

BM: You were 4-H buddies.

DH: Yes, from way back.

BM: He did administer that program for a couple of years, but it was probably after...

DH: It was later, after...

BM: Must have been the 60's or so. How many acres did you have at the time that you hired Braceros?

DH: I had four, thirty-eight acres at that time.

BM: And that was all cotton?

DH: All cotton. I didn't have any equipment to process it. Cutting, raking and baling.

BM: Now during the entire time that you used Braceros, was that primarily what you grew or did you add other crops later on?

DH: While the Bracero program was in the SOMETHING, farming was cotton. Later, I started growing alfalfa and I had a custom, cut, and baled. And later on, I could buy my own equipment and then I had quite more acres at that time. I did my own equipment baling.

BM: Did you have help with that from Braceros also?

DH: No.

BM: No. That was after?

DH: The only use for Braceros was for cotton picking. That was the case with most of the farmers.

BM: So, the program was known, you said it was well advertised in the area. And that the Braceros were hired for cotton picking and there was not mechanized cotton picking at that time...

DH: No, every acre of cotton was hand picked.

BM: Did you have to meet any specific government regulations in order to hire Braceros?

DH: Oh, yes. We had to furnish housing for them, with utilities and running water.

BM: Was that provided right on your own place?

DH: Yes.

BM: What was the housing like?

DH: Most of them were renovated adobe buildings that were on the farm and the farmer could afford to build a new home for himself and these houses were renovated for Bracero use.

BM: So there were buildings on the acreage that you bought already existing?

DH: Yes. The farm that I bought had a house where the farmer used to live. He sold it and the new owner never moved to the farm, so I bought the farm from him and it still had the SOMETHING housing.

BM: Do you know how many years you used Braceros total?

DH: I think I used them until the program died out.

BM: So that would have been like...

DH: Eight or ten years.

BM: Can you estimate how many Braceros you employed over the course of the year?

DH: My main use was for cotton picking and I usually contracted anywhere from 15 to 20 Braceros.

BM: And that would be at what time of year?

DH: Cotton picking usually started when we were SOMETHING picking, usually at the end of August or early September. And it would run into February of the following year.

BM: So that's four or five months?

DH: Yes, about four or five months.

BM: Was that typically the length of the work contract for the Bracero?

DH: Yes. There was a termination date, but if you finished your cotton picking, you were all through, then the Braceros would leave and go back to Mexico.

BM: Did you ever keep them around to do things other than cotton picking?

DH: No.

BM: Were there different tasks involved in the harvesting of cotton other than just picking it itself? Did you have any other things Braceros do?

DH: No, mainly it was cotton picking. I usually hired a person, a local person to do the weighing and he SOMETHING for sale.

BM: How did the Braceros get to your place?

DH: I had to pick them up at Rio Vista and bring them to the farm. And get them settled down in their living quarters and they were there until they left.

BM: So, if you have like 20 Braceros, they certainly wouldn't all fit in a pick-up. Did you have to hire somebody to help you?



DH: Oh, yeah, I had some friends that would help me.

BM: Did you actually have a bus, or...

DH: The Braceros that I had we could usually fit them into a three or four vehicles.

BM: Would that have been like pick-up trucks?

DH: Yeah, maybe cars. They would ride in a car, you know. I think we used some pick-ups, too. Now the Braceros that were contracted to go to Pecos, out of Rio Vista, they hauled over them in cattle trucks, in the back of cattle trucks.

BM: That doesn't sound like a lot of fun. I hope they at least take some down before they put them in there.

DH: All the Braceros that I talked to, they were fighting for it so they wouldn't be sent to Pecos. Because that wasn't the only problem, the transportation. Pecos, at that time, there was a lot of discrimination.

BM: You're talking about Pecos, Texas?

DH: Pecos, Texas, yes.

BM: I understand Texas was kind of a tough place for Braceros.

DH: (laughs)

BM: How did the Braceros get along in this area?

DH: They adjusted real well. And another thing that happened, a lot of the Anglo farmers, all over, but in my area is where I noticed them, they learned to speak Spanish. Some of them became real fluent in Spanish, with the slang and everything. Some of the Anglo farmers. There's a few still around.

BM: That was a good thing?

DH: Mmm-hmm.

BM: Made it easier for everyone?

DH: Well, it was easier for the farmer to learn Spanish, some of the bigger farmers had 30 to 40 Braceros, for all of them to speak English.

BM: Mr. Herrera, did you actually ever go to the processing center there in Rio Vista?

DH: Yes.

BM: What was it like?

DH: It was, well, to me it reminded me of a, it must have a CCC camp. Remember those?

BM: Civilian Conservation Corps?

DH: Yes, because they had houses there and facilities to feed them a light lunch and water available. Restrooms available. I'm not sure if that's what it was, but I've seen other areas where the CC projects and camping areas like that. There was one such over in Glenwood, New Mexico, west of Silver City. I don't know if you've ever been over there. The CC built a catwalk over the river there, real picturesque.

BM: You think it may have been a CCC camp at one time?

DH: I think that's probably what it was. I'm not sure, but...

BM: You were required to provide the Braceros with housing and electricity and running water. What were the requirements as to their pay?

DH: The pay was pretty uniform. At that time, when I was just using Braceros, I forget what the rate was, it was something like 80 or 90 cents per hundred pounds of cotton, or something like that. It was, labor was cheap at that time. But, so was everything else.

BM: Did you have to provide the Braceros with food also, or did they provide their own?

DH: No, they bought their own. We were fortunate that my farm was in walking distance to the stores on the street and they would go buy their own groceries. ON Saturdays, they managed to get into Anthony or Las Cruces to buy groceries at the bigger grocery stores.

BM: What did they usually buy? Do you have any idea what they ate?

DH: I think their main staple was beans. They used corn tortillas, basically, the food that their culture SOMETHING. But all those ingredients were native to here.

BM: Right. What about medical care? Did you have to provide medical care for your workers?

DH: I don't remember that I ever had to take anybody to the emergency room or anything like that. They were pretty hardly people, pretty healthy. I don't recall if I had any absences from the Braceros to show up for work. I don't recall, there may have been some, but I don't recall.

BM: What about injuries? Did any of them chop themselves with a hoe or anything?

DH: No, not really. When they're picking cotton, the only thing they could do was fall off the cotton trailer, but the trailer usually had sideboards on it.

BM: Did you ever have any government officials or any immigration service, Border Patrol, come around to check on the SOMETHING?

DH: We had housing inspection to see if we passed the farmer's and everything.

BM: What was that like?

DH: No, usually, when you had Braceros, Border Patrol wasn't involved. They wouldn't come around and check.

BM: What was the housing inspection, who did the housing inspections?

DH: I think it was someone from the Farm Bureau, I'm not sure. Basically, they came to check to see how sound the building was, if there wasn't any hazards that might hurt the Braceros, or whatever. To make sure the utilities were furnished and all that.

BM: Did you ever have any trouble with that? Did they ever write you up for anything?

DH: No. I didn't have to work on anything. I think some of the farmer's were asked to repair their wiring on the electrical lights. Most of the homes didn't have any outlets to plug in toasters, none were available. But SOMETHING was lights.

BM: But if there was work that needed to be done, the Braceros would end up doing it themselves? Were they required to do that themselves?

DH: On the house?

BM: On the house.

DH: No, I don't recall that they had to do anything. If they had a broken window, someone would report it to the farmer and he would go and repair it.

BM: Okay, so you did that if it was necessary.

DH: We had to do the upkeep.

BM: You said you think the Braceros from your farm purchased beans and corn tortillas, and that sort of thing, do you have any idea what their meals were like? Did they ever invite you over for dinner or anything?

DH: No, but I had an experience one time. I was trapping gophers on the farm. The irrigation district would pay the farmers fifty cents per tail. If you catch a gopher, you cut the tail off and take it in and they'd give you fifty cents. My kids used to

do that. One time, I had three gophers that I had trapped and I had them in the back of my pick up. They were dead, you know. They hadn't been dead very long and one of the Braceros saw them. He asked me what I was going to do with those animals. I said, "We throw them away. We just cut their tails off." He said, "Can I have them?" I said, "Sure. Why do you want them?" "We're gonna eat them." I said, "You're gonna eat the gophers?" "Oh yeah," he says, "You know SOMETHING. You know people here in the states, they go for chicken. They really like chicken meat. And a chicken is out in the corral and eats just about anything. This little animal lives underground and all they eat is green roots from different plants. That's what they live on. And it's a very clean animal. And the food was real soft, you know." He says, "These animals are cleaner than a rabbit. People eat a lot of rabbit and chicken. You think a chicken out on a farm is gonna eat anything." (laughs)

BM: Yes, I've heard that a lot of Navajo people eat prairie dog.

DH: Is that right?

BM: I guess it's the same thing as gopher.

DH: Okay. Well, prairie dog are more exposed. You'll never see a gopher along the surface, they're always underground. They make those mounds, you know, push the dirt up? I told my boys how to get the dirt out of the way and dig down until you find the hole. There's a hole going this way and that way. You set a trap at each one and then cover it up. Within six or seven hours, you go back and catch a gopher.

BM: What about moles, are they the same thing?

DH: No, I don't think they have them here.

BM: I didn't know if we did or not.

DH: We have a bunch of squirrels and gophers, skunk, but no moles.

BM: Do you happen to remember what the minimum hourly wage was?

DH: No, I sure don't. It was probably around 30 or 40 cents.

BM: It was mostly by the number of pounds of cotton picked that you weighed?

DH: When you hired do the cotton picking, then you had to pay them by the hour.

BM: I see, if it was cotton picking, then it was by pounds. Who determined the wages?

DH: I think the wage hour division.

BM: Of?

DH: The department of labor.

BM: Did they kind of dictate to the farmers...

DH: The department of labor still does that. Now they have minimum wage. And they make sure that people out there harvesting onions, even though they get paid by the pound, they still have to meet them at minimum wage or better.

BM: Did you have to keep books on what you paid each worker?

DH: We kept records for ourselves. It wasn't a government requirement.

BM: How did you go about keeping those records?

DH: We had a big tablet with all the Braceros names listed on there and the number of pounds each picked was under their name. By the end of the week, we totaled the number of pounds picked.

BM: Were you required to withhold any taxes or anything else out of their pay?

DH: No, not at that time.

BM: So they just got a lump sum?

DH: That's right.

BM: Now, hiring SOMETHING would have been through your friend at the SOMETHING, Apodaca?

DH: Mmm-hmm.

BM: And you think he was with the farm bureau?

DH: Mmm-hmm.

BM: Did the Farm Bureau, to your knowledge, have any influence over the operation of the Bracero programs?

DH: No, I'm not familiar with that. You know, it might not be a bad idea if you could interview Bob Porter. He can give you a lot of that information.

BM: Okay, I did actually. I talked to him already.

DH: Oh, you did? Cause he worked with Farm Bureau a long time.

BM: Yes, he was only labor director for a couple of years. For the Bracero program.

DH: Oh, yes, but with the Farm Bureau, he was the executive director there after John Augustine left.

END OF SIDE A, TAPE 1

- BM: Alright, so Mr. Augustine is probably another person I should talk to.
- DH: He's still pretty sharp.
- BM: Does he still live in the Las Cruces area?
- DH: Yes, in fact, he's saw a street named Creed. Later, I'll giver you the address.
- BM: Okay, so we talked about what the Braceros did for you. Can you tell me what the typical day would be like for them while harvesting cotton for you?
- DH: Basically, they came over to earn money picking cotton. They counted on five or six days doing that during the week. They didn't work on Sundays. Sundays, they had a time to do laundry or go buy groceries, stuff like that. Most farmers only worked until noon on Saturdays, so that gave them another half a day.
- BM: What time did their day start in the morning?
- DH: Cotton picking is, they could start when they wanted to. We didn't have a set time for them to start. But, by Memorial Day, if there was dew on the cotton or no mice on the cotton, by 8 o'clock they were out there picking the cotton. They were eager to get into the field and get going.
- BM: What kind of tools did they use for picking cotton?
- DH: For picking cotton? Just their hands.
- BM: Did they wear gloves?
- DH: No. I think some of them would cut their fingers around their nails here. The cotton bush is real sharp. Sometimes they'll get sore right in there and they would tape their fingers. Just like a band-aid or something.
- BM: What about hats or any particular kind of clothing?
- DH: Most of them wore hats. Some of them just bareheaded, but most of them wear hats. That was before the fad where caps came into place, nobody wore caps.
- BM: Did they wear any particular kind of clothes to protect them from the sun?
- DH: No, not really. Some of them would wear a heavy shirt over their regular shirt. That's about it.
- BM: That would be to protect them from sunburn?

DH: Yeah, but you know, one year, I had a Bracero who came from Cuahtemoc. Do you know where Cuahtemoc is?

BM: Down by Mexico City?

DH: No, by Chihuahua. Chihuahua is down in the valley and Cuahtemoc is down by the plains up there. We had a real cold day one day. The wind was blowing in from the East. Man, it made your eyes water facing the wind. I went out there around 830 and there were a few pickers out there and I told them, "It's too cold to pick cotton today. So, let's just take the day off." Most of them came from the warmer parts of Mexico and they were cold. I thought they all had left. At noon, I drove the farm and there was one fellow picking cotton over there. In short sleeve shirt. He was just picking away. I stopped and walked into the fields to tell him, "Hey, I told the other people to take the day off. It's too cold to be picking cotton." He said, "This weather is not cold, it's just right. I come from a part of Mexico where the water freezes in late September and it doesn't thaw out until Spring." (laughs) And he's from Cuahtemoc. And it's up in the plains, and it gets real cold there. He was used to that. And he kept picking cotton. By next morning, he had three sacks full. (laughs)

BM: Did they have big bags for picking cotton?

DH: We had to furnish the sacks for them.

BM: What were those made out of?

DH: Canvas. White canvas.

BM: What size?

DH: Most of them were anywhere from six to nine feet long. Nine feet long is kind of clumsy to be carrying around. Most of them were seven to eight feet. There were about two feet in diameter.

BM: That would carry around a lot of cotton, I guess.

DH: Oh, yes. A full sack would weigh right around 100 pounds, a little less, a little more.

BM: Did you have a lot of contact with your Braceros?

DH: Mainly at work, yes.

BM: You were their direct supervisor, then?

DH: Well, yeah. One of my farms was just a little further down, closer to the canal, you know you cross the canal over there, I guess, so you were pretty close to my home.

BM: When you say across the canal, you mean across...

DH: This side of the canal. Down the canal, on this side.

BM: You mean East of the canal. We're talking about the canal that would be where?

DH: SOMETHING. Which way did you come in, from the East?

BM: Yes.

DH: Oh, you didn't quite get to the canal. You see that white canal over there? That's where the canal is. The irrigation canal.

BM: East of Mr. Herrera's farm in Mesquite, and that would be running North and South?

DH: The canal runs North and South.

BM: Okay, along, what is it? 428?

DH: 428 is about twelve blocks distance away.

BM: Okay, 428. We were talking about where the ditch was in relation to where your other place was. So where was your little place from, near here?

DH: I SOMETHING some farm near my house. Then it extends to where the Bracero house used to be. It's not there anymore. My pecan acreage runs to the next SOMETHING ditch that I water. I have three OR THIRTY acres on the other side of that concrete ditch and that's where the house was. And then, I've got hundred and sixty acres about a mile and a half down.

BM: That would be about a mile and a half down from 228.

DH: Yes. 228.

BM: And south on 428. Did you ever know the Braceros by name?

DH: I knew all of the ones I had by name.

BM: Any one in...

DH: I had a neighbor next to me, SOMETHING. Sometimes, his Braceros would come and work OR TALK to me.

ANOTHER VOICE: Hi, how'ya doing?

DH: That's my younger son, Andy.



BM: Let me turn this off for a moment.

DH: He's a farmer now. (TAPE INTERRUPTION/STOPS)

BM: So, it sorts of makes a new chapter every time we start over. It makes what we call a new draft. So, we were talking about knowing the Braceros by name and then you were talking about one of your neighbor's who also used Braceros. I don't know what you were going to tell me about...

DH: We traded labor. SOMETHING. We kind of worked together.

BM: Did any particular Braceros stand out in your memory? Were any of them especially...

DH: No, none of them that I know of came back to this area after they got their residential passport. They, I'm pretty sure most of them did come back later to get their residential visas.

BM: Is there any particular Bracero that became an especially valued employee for you? Like, did you try to rehire the same people every year?

DH: We couldn't do that because the Braceros had no choice in saying where they wanted to go when they came from Mexico. They could have gone to Deming, they could have gone to Roswell, anywhere, you know. Deming, Roswell, Artesia, Carlsbad. They all had Braceros.

BM: Did you know the foreman for your farm?

DH: I was doing the farming myself.

BM: You were it.

DH: Yeah, I did hire the person to do the weighing of the cotton when we were picking cotton. To keep track of the pound for each.

BM: Did he have any other responsibilities in relationship to the Braceros?

DH: No.

BM: Do you happen to know what the Braceros did on their days off besides laundry and grocery shopping?

DH: No, I'm not sure. They probably brought some cards or dominoes to play. I'm not sure really.

BM: Did you have any problems with Braceros getting into trouble and drinking?

DH: No. I never did get any calls to go bail somebody out of jail.

BM: Did any of the Braceros who worked for you bring their families with them?

DH: No. The Bracero program was strictly for male employees.

BM: Did you give them any special privileges? Paid vacation days, or anything like that?

DH: No, it was seasonal work, so you know.

BM: So, they did not have any holidays off?

DH: No. Of course, they had time off when we had weather conditions, like rain or something like that.

BM: So you don't know what they did for fun, per se?

DH: No, I really don't. I know they enjoyed going to town. They kind of just looking around getting to know the country. Most of them were too shy to go out and find out that they couldn't converse with people because they didn't know the language.

BM: So they kind of kept to themselves because of the language?

DH: They were a lot of Hispanics they could converse with. If they went to the store, there were no people who could speak Spanish, they would be kind of shy going in there.

BM: That makes perfect sense. When the contract ended with the Braceros, they would go straight to Mexico?

DH: Yes, as far as I SOMETHING. They had to be processed back into Mexico. The program, they had to account for the Braceros coming in and they had to account for the Braceros leaving the country, too.

BM: I see, but if it was not necessarily the end of the contract, and your neighbor needed someone, they could go over there and work for a few days?

DH: Mmm-hmm.

BM: What were your obligations at the end of the contract?

DH: I completed my obligations. I furnished what I was supposed to furnish for them, like the house and utilities and all that. That was my main obligation. And, of course, providing them a job. That's a must. They came over to do some work, that was the purpose of the program.

BM: You said you might have up to 20 Braceros work for you each year?

DH: Yes, that was the top number.

BM: For how many years would you say you hired Braceros?

DH: I don't remember. I started about the mid 50's, probably until the end of the 50's, probably about 4 or 5 years. I'm not too sure about the time limit thing.

BM: You said you did not have any problems with the Braceros? Fistfights, or anything?

DH: Not that I'm aware of.

BM: Criminal behavior?

DH: Not the ones that I had. Some of the farmers may have different experiences, but I never did have any problems with them.

BM: Did they ever complain to you about their living conditions or wages or anything?

DH: No. Basically, I think what we furnished them was a lot better than what they had at home.

BM: Did they stage any strikes or labor protests in your area, not necessarily just against you?

DH: No, no. Not that I'm aware of.

BM: Did you ever, in addition to the Braceros, hire undocumented workers?

DH: They were always a few undocumented workers SOMETHING. In 1981, we started SOMETHING were undocumented. And that's basically what operated the dairy for awhile.

BM: Did you ever have any conflict during the Bracero program between hiring Braceros and hiring undocumented workers?

DH: No, at that time, when the Bracero program went out of existence, that's when the illegal immigrants came in here to work.

BM: So, you never had any undocumented and Braceros working at the same time?

DH: No

BM: In your opinion, what was the quality of the Braceros work?

DH: Most of them, the ones that I contracted, were real good workers. Real dedicated to doing farmwork. They were raised on farms, you know, so they knew farmwork.

BM: How would their work compare to that of say Anglo farmworkers or New Mexican-American farmworkers who already lived here?

DH: I don't know if we can make a good comparison then because labor was so scarce at that time for farming. And for cotton picking, it required a lot of labor for short period of time. So, we didn't have any labor to fill that void. We had to rely on Braceros.

BM: Was it that the local people did not want to work seasonally or...

DH: A lot of them already had their jobs lined up. Some of them in construction, some of them in sales and whatnot.

BM: What would you say were the advantages and disadvantages of the Bracero program?

DH: The program in itself served a purpose for the farmer and to help the people of Mexico because they came and they earned. I don't know, I'd venture to say, four times the amount of money they could have made at home. It was a short duration, but we needed the labor to get our crops out. We just didn't have the labor. Then we all started working with mechanical pickers, but there was no comparison with mechanical pickers and handpickers. Now, they have perfected the cotton pickers where they do a real good job. They started out, it was a SOMETHING machine that picked the cotton real thrashy and SOMETHING.

BM: Initially, when mechanization began and the Braceros were preferable to...

DH: They terminated the Bracero program, I think on account of the labor unions. They always complained the Bracero program was taking the jobs away from the American people should be doing. That wasn't really true because there wasn't enough of them anyway to fill the void in the farms. So, they terminated the Bracero program and that stimulated the work on the mechanical pickers.

BM: Do you think the Bracero program should be reinstated?

DH: At this point, I don't think so. Not for cotton anyway. The cotton there is no way you could pick it the way the cotton picker does. In volume.

BM: So its to the point where its more efficient than...

DH: Oh, yes. It's more efficient than

BM: hand labor

DH: One cotton picker can pick what 60 to 80 Braceros could pick in one day. Just one cotton picker. So you get your crops out a lot faster, preventing the exposure to weather elements out on the farm. At this point, the Bracero program wouldn't do any good for the cotton crop.

BM: What about other crops?

DH: I farmed until 1990. I was involved in going SOMETHING. I grew onions, lettuce, spinach, SOMETHING a lot of labor. Some of the labor still needs to be done by hand, but now, a labor contractor goes to the border and picks up the workers from the border and brings them to the farmer wherever there is a need for them. We work through labor contractors. And that's how I worked when I was farming SOMETHING. I'd do the SOMETHING, but once the SOMETHING started going, it all had to be done by hand labor. There's no machine that could do that. The lettuce has to be thinned out so that there is only one plant, eight or ten inches. If there is two plants there, neither of them would make a good lettuce because they grow oblong instead of round. But it has to be done by hand.

BM: So you are still using farm laborers from Mexico, but others....

DH: SOMETHING, not Braceros. There's quite a few people who have residential status, but they live in Juarez, it's cheaper for them to live there. But they still come and work in the states.

BM: So they would be people who would have green cards?

DH: What?

BM: Green cards?

DH: Yes. But the labor contractor, he has a bus, he picks them up at the border, brings them to the farmer, and charges the farmer for transporting the labor and keeping records on them. And the farmer pays the labor contractor and he pays the labor.

BM: In a way, the program has continued, it's in a different form.

DH: In a different form, that's correct. I think in Florida and other states, they still bring in labor from South America to harvest the apple crop or cheery crop or whatever.

BM: From South America? You mean beyond Mexico?

DH: Central America mainly.

BM: Alright, I gather that you don't think it's appropriate that the Bracero program be reinstated?

DH: I don't think there's much of a possibility of it being reinstated because the labor unions will fight it. They feel that bringing in foreign labor is going to take jobs from the American people. They'll fight it. Labor unions have a lot of power, you know. So, for that reason, I don't think the Bracero program will be reinstated.

BM: Is there anything that we haven't covered about it, that you would like to discuss, about the program?

DH: The Bracero program would fill the void right now for the chile industry because the working on a mechanical chile picker, but it hasn't been perfected to be real efficient. If you gave it more time, they'll probably have a chile picker that'll work as well as a cotton picker does for picking cotton.

BM: How long would you expect that window of time to be?

DH: That depends on the need for it. Right now, they seem to get by with bringing in the labor for chile picking from Juarez. But if that labor gets a little too costly, now it is more costly than it used to be, then the work on the mechanical picker will be accelerated and they can get it perfected in a short amount of time. I think the university over here is working on that.

BM: Probably. The chile industry is kind of hurting for labor right now?

DH: Yeah, right now. But, if SOMETHING, the chile processing plants in this area are bring the chile growing in Mexico cheaper than they can buy it from the local farmers. So, that's another thing to consider. (laughs)

BM: Well, is there anything that you would like to say about your years of working with the Bracero program and what it contributed to your farm in particular?

DH: All I can say, is the Bracero program, when it was in operation, provided a real service for the farmer that was very needed and it also provided the people of Mexico a job where they could improve their living in Mexico, too.

BM: So you think it was a good thing for both sides?

DH: I think it was good for both countries really.

BM: I think we pretty much covered this so I'm going to stop this, unless you have anything else to add...

DH: No, I guess not.

DRAFT