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Interview no. 1572

John Tomlin

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: John Tomlin

Interviewer: Beth Morgan

Project: Bracero Oral History Project

Location: Las Cruces, New Mexico

Date of Interview: April 23, 2003

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Transcript No.: 1572

Transcriber: Courtney Richards

John Tomlin was born on April 20, 1926 in Albuquerque, New Mexico; his father died of polio when he was an infant, leaving his mother to run the family farm on her own; he later went on to serve in the military, receive his master's degree, and ultimately work as a farmer; from 1948-1964, he hired braceros to help him tend the land. Mr. Tomlin recalls how his mother ran the farm after his father's passing by using Italian and German POWs; in 1946, after finishing his tour of duty in the Army, he returned home and began attending New Mexico State University; the following year in 1947, he started running the farm on his own while he went to school; in 1948, he began hiring braceros; he used a crew of thirty men during the cotton harvest, which ran from mid September to the beginning of December; he had about six braceros who stayed on year-round driving tractors and irrigating; oftentimes, he had to go the El Paso Coliseum to hire workers because the working contracts needed to be renewed periodically; he provided housing with showers, utensils, and bedding in addition to equipment such as hoes, shovels, and boots for irrigating; the braceros often went home to México on holidays or to care for sick relatives; they did not work Saturday afternoons or on Sundays; he goes on to recount anecdotes of the braceros in general and stories of particular workers he was fond of.

Length of Interview 127 minutes

Length of Transcript 51 pages

Name of Interviewee: John Tomlin

Date of Interview: April 23, 2003

Name of Interviewer: Beth Morgan

BM: So we're recording now and I have to ask you first when and where you were born?

JT: I was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

BM: And when was that?

JT: April 20, 1926.

BM: Where did you grow up and go to school?

JT: In Las Cruces.

BM: And were your parents farmers?

JT: My father farmed a little bit. He was an engineer, had been in the Army and went in several times in World War II (Unintelligible). He kind of caught polio and died here. And went to Beaumont and El Paso, he bought the farm and started it, but he figured that anybody could farm if they just learned the trade.

BM: What was your father's name?

JT: Gerard Tomlin.

BM: Where was he from originally?

JT: He was from Missouri originally. He came west as a young man either to fight for or against Pancho Villa. He ended up joining the Army at Ft. Bliss.

BM: Interesting.

JT: And he was a champion boxer at Ft. Bliss. [He] held the title while he was there. And they went to Scotland. They were sent there to get ready to go over to the Germans, which they did, but the poison gas hurt him.

BM: I see.

JT: So he left us and I was about two and half years old. My mother was educated in Missouri. She taught and was a principal and a superintendent in Missouri, and in Missouri University and then she went to Colorado University and then when my father died, she said, "Well, I'll run the farm," which she did. Did a better job than we'd have done (unintelligible) times.

BM: I believe you mentioned that she had used prisoners of war...

JT: Yes, she used Italian prisoners of war...

BM: ...as farm laborers.

JT: Well, first the most of the labor came out of Arkansas and Oklahoma. They come in and pick the cotton, and stay over some of them and do a little of the fieldwork. But we didn't have any influx of Mexicans coming from Mexico at that time. I still wonder why there wasn't a push then to come over. But then we worked Italian prisoners and then they worked German prisoners. Throughout that time I joined the Army and I become a company Sergeant and fought in Europe at the end of the Battle of the Bulge at that time. And then I didn't have enough points as you had to have to come home, so they trained me to be a military policeman. And about that time they're going to ship me to, later shipment to Tokyo for the invasion. Thank God the atomic bomb came, or I probably wouldn't be here today. I still stayed in Europe until I got enough points to come home. And then I went to New Mexico State when I got home, and then the next year I started running the farm as I went to school. And I farmed it ever since. That was about 1947.

BM: 1947? And when did your parents buy this place?

JT: They bought it in 1926.

BM: Okay, so they had it about...

JT: Yeah.

BM: ...twenty years or so...

JT: Um-hm.

BM: ...at the time that you started farming. So you have always farmed then since you got out of the Service. Is that correct?

JT: Well, I taught school for five years for New Mexico State with Veterans. Then I went back and got my Masters degree. And after I got through with that, I got a chance to lease a big farm. So I farmed a big farm, and then I thought, well I better go back and get my Masters. And so I did. So then I was able to raise our children, send them all through college. Two sons and a daughter went to New Mexico State and got their degrees.

BM: Okay and what were your degrees in Mr. Tomlin?

JT: Bachelor of Science of Agricultures, Soils – Ag education has a double major. And then I got my masters in Education on Administration and a minor in Psychology and Ag Education.

BM: Okay.

JT: And then after that, I was encouraged to get into the Legislature. So I became a State Representative and served in that capacity for ten years.

BM: Do you mind if I ask if you're a Republican or a Democrat?

JT: I'm a Democrat, but really I was always taught to respect both sides of the eye on and in politics you have to. You have to have votes on both sides. So I held a track record. I think I passed over 108 Bills into law. I used to carry all the Governor Bills for four different Governors.

BM: That's a lot of Bills.

JT: Which is a track record. Didn't do much good because New Mexico will not pay a salary to a Legislator.

BM: Okay. So you said that you began farming here then in 1947. Is that correct?

JT: Yes, that's when I took over actually and did work. It was rented before that.

BM: Okay. I believe that the Bracero Project, I mean program would have been in effect then since 1942. Did you uh...

JT: I have no evidence or knowledge of them being that early. It might have been in Texas or other areas, but we didn't even know what wetbacks were until after World War II. We had a lot of them come over...

BM: Um-hm.

JT: ... and I know I was supposed to go to El Paso and study President Truman's gestures - he had the most world record hand and only knew his gestures when he talked. So I was in a speech class. I went down there, and we had a cotton crop to get out and we couldn't get anybody to come pick the cotton. So we had one of our Senators got on a train in Deming, the Truman train, and told him, "We got to do something." So the first thing that the President said when he talked to us in El Paso at the station was, "Let's open the borders and get this cotton crop out."

Which they did. The Mexicans came over and picked the cotton and helped everybody out.

BM: That was what year?

JT: That would've been [19]48, I believe.

BM: [19]48? Okay. And that was your first experience using Mexican nationals as farm workers?

JT: Well, I'd grown up with Mexicans. The only trouble I had when I was little, I learned Spanish and then they would want to whip me at school because I spoke language that was a no-no, which should have been the other way around. But they were always around. We had lots of sheep at one time, and we had kind of migrant ones that liked to come and work with the sheep. There was a lot of people in Mexico, they're kind of like German though; they're specialists and you can get them to do what they really like and they're trained for you, you get real professional work.

BM: Um-hm. At the time that you began using Mexican nationals or braceros, how many acres were you farming?

JT: Oh, we were only farming about fifty acres.

BM: Okay.

JT: That people could make a living on it at that time like that whereas today you farm say 2,000 acres and you can't make as much profit as you did then.

BM: So that would have been in the late 1940s?

JT: Yeah.

BM: Okay. And what were you raising at that time?

JT: We raised alfalfa and cotton mainly.

BM: Okay. And what about later on, did you change your crops at all or...?

JT: Oh, we tried everything from sweet potatoes in 1950, I think, and onions and then we kind of got out of it and then we went back into it more intensely and today we're probably, main highlight of our operation is onions.

BM: Um-hm. Okay.

JT: We grew about every crop. We even tested soybeans here, but they don't grow good here because we have an iron deficiency in the soil and they turn yellow and

when they're ready (doorbell rings) to harvest, the hoe explodes in the air and you can't combine them good.

BM: Interesting.

JT: Probably someday they can get us a variety that'll work.

BM: Okay, so your first experience, when you first heard about the Bracero Program, that was on your train trip?

JT: No, it came afterward. I think the President, to me, helped get it set up because there was a lot of criticism with these people, might want to stay and they didn't want them to stay, and we never had that problem. They all wanted to get home as quick as they could.

BM: And this was mostly post World War II then?

JT: It was what?

BM: Post World War II.

JT: Yeah.

BM: Can you tell me why you decided to employ braceros?

JT: There was no other choice. There was no other labor.

BM: And why was that?

JT: I guess a lot of those people I mentioned like from Oklahoma, they were nice people, and they'd come every year. They quit coming, they all got in the defense plants in World War II in California most all of them, they really got ahead. So it left a void there that had to be filled somewhere. And Mexican nationals were very noted for doing whatever they were told to do. There was no feeling of I'm in the wrong area or something like that of employment.

BM: Um-hm. What did you have to do to hire braceros? Did you...

JT: Well, we had, we went through the Farm Bureau here. There was labor associations, and they set up a deal where they would get insurance, you had have them insured. You had a criteria to follow from the federal government. It was very stringent in their housing and all that. And then if you qualified, it cost anywhere from twenty-five to fifty dollars a man, it wasn't cheap; pretty expensive; and the contract had to be renewed I don't know every six months or something three months...

BM: So that was just what it cost to hire a bracero?

JT: To get the permit, to get the, and when you got him on board you had to go get them. We got them, on one case we had to go and pay a general in Juarez, officer, high Mexican officer, to allow them to come in. And we would go over see him, and give him a little bit of a token to do that work and then they'd have them ready for the bus, the number for your count the next day.

BM: Would that be something in the nature of an unofficial payment?

JT: No, it was official payment. It was to clarify the fact that those people were coming over here.

BM: I see.

JT: So they could know where their presence was.

BM: Okay. And did you actually then have to go down and select the people that you wanted, or did you have a choice in that?

JT: If you knew as it went on you could go and pick them or call them in Mexico and have them or write them a letter have them come through, your problem was that they could come through so easy they didn't want to follow the routine of coming in legally. And they'd be waiting say in at the Coliseum in El Paso for you and I says, "Oh, go back. You've got to come in the right way."

BM: Uh-hm.

JT: And then you would get them. The other problem, some of them would get homesick or didn't like it. They wanted to go home right away once you started to, got them to work. You could always tell when they're about ready to leave you and that is they would start buying clothes to take home, and they always liked these blue suitcases, kind of like a little trunk. And when you saw them getting them, you knew you weren't going to have them around long. They usually would like to quit you on Sunday morning. That meant that we had to pay them on a Saturday at noon. And the one thing stranger they didn't like to work Saturday afternoons or Sundays unless it was irrigation, a necessity. It was quite an interesting thing to watch them get the blue suitcases in preparation for leaving. Usually they would all leave you. You lose say, you had fifteen or ten, they'd all leave at one time there. They're strange that way. That's one of the things you

had with them, they liked to work in a group, stay in a group. We used to kid someone couldn't eat unless they had somebody with them, you know.

BM: So, can you tell me what the government regulations were that you had to follow in order to use bracero labor?

JT: As I recall I could be skipping something, the main thing was insurance and clean housing. You had to furnish a bedding, utensils, a place for them to cook their food. They were noted for say buying food and chopping it up, like a tomato. They'd chop it up; they wouldn't buy a canned tomato at all or anything like that or frozen foods. They liked to chop up the commodity and prepare it right there. They did most of their cooking at night for the next day. And you had to have heat in the house. One problem the government didn't understand is why we didn't have enough heat. You get thirty men in a big house it heats up pretty quick, especially with all that cooking.

BM: Um-hm. Okay. Well, what time of the year would you usually get them and how long would they stay?

JT: Well, you'd usually get them (interruption) about oh in the late springtime, say about May, and start getting them because you had to more or less provide them with work to meet your obligation of your contract with the government to get them through. So you'd get them when the leaves were beginning to grow and then in the fall we tried to get them in about the twentieth of September to handpick cotton. One advantage when they handpicked it, you got so much better quality. The machines tend to get leaves and bark and things in the cotton lent. The new machines are pretty well sophisticated, and you don't have that problem, but we had the old machines then. There were a few that'd come out in 1948, and people bought them and I think they bought them mainly to try to scare the workers to pick and say, "When you don't work, we'll put the machine in the field", but they weren't that efficient, like the man. The only thing you had to and weigh ever, you had to weigh every sack of cotton picked and pay them accordingly. And you had to watch out that they didn't try to get to you, have a rock sewed to the sack or something like that because they're mischievous, just like a bunch of young adolescent boys really, but you have to watch that. And

then the best policy was to pick one of them and make him responsible for the crew, and they'd respect him more than they would anybody else you could put in. Or put your wife or daughter, they like women to wait on them, they really were very courteous to the women. And that way then they saw that the job was done right.

BM: Interesting. This is probably backtracking a little bit. What kind of paperwork did you have to go through in order to hire these guys?

JT: Well, the main thing they wanted was the money so that they could ensure that you could take care of them. If you couldn't afford, let's say fifty dollars per man, you couldn't get them. And then they would give them a card to come over, and they'd be issued a card. But the cost was pretty high really for what you got because they could leave you anytime, and you couldn't get your money back. It made them valuable. Now you probably wonder how did we know how to select good men that are unknown, that's the question, and main thing you turn your hands up and you look at the palms of the hands of the workers and you can tell whether they're workers or out of the city and never touched work. And we've seen them even go out and rub their hands on railroad tracks down by El Paso to get them looking weathered a little bit to get the job. We had some men that, we had one called Apodaca that was here; we hired him and he could just pick you the best men in the world. I can't refer him to you because he died here a while back. He sure knew how to select good men.

BM: Apodaca was that (unintelligible).

JT: Yeah. Uh-hm.

BM: Okay. So he was the, was he the labor contractor?

JT: He worked with us at Farm Bureau and then he split off and started one of this own down by Anthony.

BM: I see. Okay. And it was the Dona Ana County Farm Livestock?

JT: Farm Bureau.

BM: Bureau? Okay, that administered the program. Okay. How many years would you say you employed braceros?

JT: Let's see, what was the ending date [19]64?

BM: [19]64. Yeah.

JT: We had them all that time. In fact being an officer in Farm Bureau, the government got real hostile with us, and so we all went to court. And the chairman of the Farm Bureau was in India on the exchange program, so I had to take his place and we had to go to federal court in Albuquerque. And they threw us out, said we weren't supposed to be there. And that gave us grounds then to go to Washington. And we took our lawyers from here, they weren't allowed to testify because they weren't from there, didn't have licenses to practice law in Washington. So it was very expensive; it took about a week; And one of the stalls that we had, we had the men around and the program was ending, they didn't want it anymore, they didn't like the way we ran them or something; I think it was just red tape, but it gave us a chance, the farmers here and everywhere, to start legalizing the best ones to keep. And that way we all did it, and it made a real good thing for the farmers and ranchers.

BM: And would say that was at the end of the Bracero Program?

JT: That was the end of it.

BM: Okay...

JT: Now one, if you wonder why did it end, they wanted more fringe benefits for them. They wanted twelve foot ceilings let's say in the houses. They were just unrealistic requirements the government put in. It all started with some special letter (unintelligible) or something from the President, I don't know what, it was either Eisenhower or Kennedy. But anyway nobody ever wanted to fool with labor, even national Farm Bureau, "No, we won't touch labor". So that's why we were on our own more or less this area trying to get the thing resolved, and a lot of ramifications. I don't know, Mr. Porter should know a lot of that. I don't know if you've got a chance to talk to him, but he later became the head of State Farm Bureau.

BM: Actually, I did talk to Mr. Porter, but we didn't talk about a lawsuit. I will have to give him a call and see if he wants to add to his interview, but, um, so you think that...

JT: The one that went with me from here on that was Mr. Carl Fabien, and he had, later was County Chairman, but he's, not too many around that were involved in it.

BM: I have a call into him. I have not interviewed him yet, but maybe I will be able to do that in the future.

JT: Now, I had a problem in Washington. They didn't want me to testify because I rented land. They said that's a no-no, and I said, "We all rent land. You can't afford to own a lot of land. There's no way."

BM: So they were...

JT: Yeah, they were, when we knew we'd lose the case because the judge had lunch every day with the Secretary of Labor. (Chuckles) But labor is something that you have to really follow the rules. I know I've had to, I've been on a state committee with the U.S. government, and you have to take all this civil rights training and all that and it's quite a, quite an ordeal. And maybe it's to protect the worker, and the same thing here, they just wanted more protection for them, which is alright.

BM: And that was basically the cause of the program ending?

JT: Well, I think it got too expensive. And you had mechanization [sic] came in and that way you could put that best person that you were contracting, that you had sponsored, you could put him on that cotton picker to driving. Then you take your one picker take the place of thirty men, whereas today, our pickers probably take care of three hundred people. They're more efficient and bigger. There's something else there that, you get into the ramifications of these workers. You couldn't get rid of a bad one unless you just took him in and then would, you'd lose your money, you'd never come out. Now there were some freeloaders of the Mexicans, of course, that came in. We had such a wonderful medical insurance, paid for any operation, cold or anything like that. And they tended to, some of them, ride that to their glory. We had one and they said he was a professional baseball player from Mexico City. And the first thing we knew, he had said he jabbed his eye with a cotton stalk picking cotton. The eye surgeon went ahead and did the work. It was thousands of dollars, but corrected him, but he stay long after it was corrected. But I had one, one time and his eyes had a red

(unintelligible) over them. And they were able; the doctors took care of him. We thought we'll lose him too, but he's still around. What I should mention is how did you get these legalized halfway? And that was you had to sponsor them as a grower. You can do it in any local (unintelligible) sponsoring a worker, you have to more or less guarantee them a job, guarantee that they won't be a freeloader to society, and see that they have housing and get along. In one case I know we legalized one family. They had about thirteen kids. We had to get, for all of them. Today most of these kids, they're body shop workers or some strange work, and they do good work here in El Paso. It shows how if you have a fairly high IQ, which these people had, that we couldn't find locally that was one of the reasons it success.

BM: Um-hm. Let's see. So...

JT: The other thing that health-wise I don't mention, you had to have showers for them, and they got to where they knew that they needed to keep very clean. That was very good because it kept down any problems on their health. Now what happened today, you can't sponsor them like you used to could, that I know of. Their own families sponsor them, which is not a very good rule because they get old uncle so-and-so, their fathers, a lot are very, they're not healthy-wise to really do much work. But the law allows them to bring their families in. Now the work the crews today are all mostly from Mexico come in daily. They all have green cards. Somewhere they've gotten sponsored somewhere, from a relative or a past employer or something and that's where we get our crews, and they're pretty good, pretty efficient crews.

BM: So when you say halfway naturalized...

JT: That means you can't vote. You just started a procedure, and to finish it you have to learn some things to pass the test for the, for clearance, for the citizenship.

BM: Okay.

JT: But the first step isn't hard.

BM: So the first step you would say is getting the green card?

JT: It's just like say you had a (unintelligible) that's real good, and you find out that she likes the country. Well, you can go down and sponsor her, but you are going

to have to agree that you would see that she lives a healthful life and that she has insurance and that she has a good steady job with you all along.

BM: Okay. So, would you say that you used braceros from like 1948 to 1964? This is going to backtrack a little bit.

JT: Okay. Yeah.

BM: 1948 to 1964.

JT: Well, actually we used them longer than that because the ones that were legalized stayed.

BM: Except that then they would not have been...

JT: There are still a few around.

BM: ... (Unintelligible) braceros anymore. Okay.

JT: Now I've got a couple of men working for me now that were sponsored by other farmers, they're no longer around.

BM: How many braceros do you think you employed over the years?

JT: Hm...

BM: You said, what eighteen to twenty a year?

JT: We ended up with about thirty-two. Of course that was just for cotton picking, and you had your regular ones that stayed year-round, you'd probably work about four to six.

BM: Four to six year-round?

JT: Um-hm.

BM: And what would you have the four to six do on a year-round...?

JT: Oh, they drove tractors and irrigated - that was the hard thing, getting people to irrigate. One thing I'll say for these people, they can stay with a head of water for a hundred hours if necessary. They know how sleep and time their water, and not cause any problems which is a skill. Usually it looks like the laziest man is the best irrigator, but not so because he's got it under control, he times it and knows when to stop and start in different sections of the farm.

BM: But it was hard to get people who had that skill?

JT: Yeah.

BM: Okay. What was the usual length of a work contract?

JT: I just don't know particularly now. I know they had to be renewed every so and so. We sometimes would just take them down to get them renewed. And I got one, it was interesting but one time we had one of these, maybe he was a good worker, he'd even milk the cow for you and he kept everything perfect and all. His contract came up to be renewed, so I told mother, "Can you do it?" – I was doing some other work, and she took him down to immigration all come around and she says, "What's wrong?" He says, "You've got a fugitive here. He's a murderer and no good." She's like, "He's the best man we've ever had." She felt very sorry for him and they let him off. Maybe he'd been victimized and you never know.

BM: This was your wife who took him down?

JT: My mother.

BM: Your mother? Okay.

JT: Yeah, she loved to work. It was because she never had any problems with them.

BM: Okay. And what was your mother's name?

JT: Sallie – S-a-l-l-i-e.

BM: Okay.

JT: Yeah, she was one of the first women farmers, I guess you'd say.

BM: So she went down and dealt with the authorities then?

JT: Uh-hm. You'd have to sometimes take them in to get them renewed. They'd have to look at them.

BM: Okay. Well, if you were hiring someone say for example for hiring, for picking cotton, how long did the cotton-picking season last?

JT: It lasted until the first of December, from September to...

BM: September to December?

JT: Uh-hm.

BM: So would that be typically the period of time that those people would work?

JT: Yeah.

BM: Okay. And then the other guys you said you had four to six year-round.

JT: Now sometimes they would come in and work wet and the only thing if they're wetback that just meant they didn't have papers, and they would work really

better when they were wet than when they were legalized because they knew they had to get that money to send back to their families and all that. But they always, I remember one time the Immigration came to mother and says, "We got to take this guy," and she says, "Well, can you let him finish irrigating? We've got to get through." And they did; they were very cooperative. And I know one time one them asked me, "Will he run away?" And I said, "No, he won't run away. When he gives me his word, it's good."

BM: Is that the immigration service you were talking about?

JT: Yeah. We felt sorry for them. The immigration were always looking around for them. Today, it's changed; I understand that we'd never see a wetback on the farm anymore that we know is wet.

BM: Um-hm.

JT: And if they catch them with one in your car, then more or less the immigration will take your car. We had one that's wife um hauled her brother up here and they caught him and they took his car and he had a time getting the car back. So the rules are pretty harsh, whereas some real aristocrat has no problem coming in.

BM: (Chuckles) Oh yeah. Okay. For example then during the cotton-picking season, say you had thirty braceros...

JT: Um-hm.

BM: ...that you hired to pick cotton, is that all they did or did some of them have other jobs?

JT: No, that was all they did.

BM: That was all they did?

JT: It was just a steady go there until you got through.

BM: Okay and the ones that were here year round then they did things like drive tractors and irrigate?

JT: General work.

BM: How did the braceros get from Mexico to your place?

JT: They came in buses that usually loaded at the Coliseum or at the border. But mainly the Coliseum was a terminal, and they would say send fifty or a hundred a day up to Las Cruces. And they'd usually come in the evening. And then they're

assigned to you. You go in, in your truck and say I've got five or thirty, whatever, and they would count them out to you. And then you'd have to take them. The first thing you had to do was take them to get food. So these little grocery stores all around the valley, wherever the farmer lived, close to. We'd take them there and those stores did good business. You'd set it up and give them credit, and then take it out of their wages in the next week or two. But they always first had to get their groceries, and then you'd take them to put them in their housing.

BM: Okay. Now you mention the Coliseum in El Paso, was that part of the University or...?

JT: No, uh-huh. It was just like it is today. They just used the facility, a place to, we didn't in fact go inside we did it outside the...of the Coliseum.

BM: Okay. Well, I'm trying to figure out what building that is exactly. I'm not sure...

JT: I don't know. There wasn't any building to it. We were just in the parking lot where they set it up. And I'd just go and get them.

BM: Was that like uh a baseball...?

JT: No, it was just like a big transient area. It was just a matter of sending the buses to different locations.

BM: Was that downtown or where was it?

JT: At the Coliseum in El Paso. It's still there.

BM: The Coliseum. So is that like the Sun Bowl or...?

JT: No, no. It's over there, uh, let's see. You go down Paisano and the main Coliseum - I don't know if it's on your right or left. It's where they have the stock show.

BM: Oh, I see. Stock show.

JT: It made a good place to congregate them.

BM: Okay.

JT: The other thing is that you had to do and provide was help send their money back home with money orders.

BM: Um-hm.

JT: And you had to go through a registered money order through the post office because the thieves there would get to them, but this worked. And that way they got their money home. But it was always on Monday. You'd spend a lot of hours taking them to the doctor, taking them their money orders to get them sent. We usually just send them for them and bring them back the receipt. If they sent anything in a letter, it never made it.

BM: You mean like cash?

JT: Yeah.

BM: Okay. What about checks?

JT: They wouldn't honor them then.

BM: Interesting. Okay.

JT: I shouldn't say that, they might have honored them at certain places. But if you had real good people in the post office, they helped a lot. We had one guy and he had such a friendly good way about him, he ended up being the county clerk and then a state representative and then head of the National Guard here, but it was personality that counted.

BM: What was his name?

JT: Whew. His name was Mike Fritz.

BM: Okay. I know of the Fritz family.

JT: Yeah, there's one the, let's see, I think city commission now. But they're good people.

BM: Okay. You mentioned earlier, I kind of got the impression I guess that you had gone to one of the bracero processing centers, or reception center. Did you?

JT: Well, yeah. You had to go personally and get them.

BM: And uh...

JT: Sometimes you might get a friend to get them, but it's real dangerous. And your other problem was that say you had two real good men there, word gets around and some of these big farmers will try to get them away from you. Now that's where, like we mention (unintelligible) Apodaca ran the other association; he was so good at seeing that you got your men back that they didn't play favorites and give them to some big rich farmer. But it was kind of an embarrassing situation

to make sure that you got your men, and that somebody else didn't get them by bribe or some system of popularity.

BM: But that would've been then just in El Paso. Did you ever...

JT: No, here in Las Cruces, too.

BM: Okay.

JT: See, they'll bring say a busload to Las Cruces, and they'll count them out, like you need ten? We'll give you ten. And if you knew them and they knew they were good, then other people would, word get around so you had to watch them.

BM: Who were the big rich farmers around here?

JT: Uh, they, uh, I guess you always have that. They had big acreage and very wealthy type.

BM: Did you ever actually have to go over to I guess they would call it like a reception center where the, uh, braceros were being housed before they could come into the country? I think they had one in...

JT: Well, that would be the Coliseum in El Paso.

BM: Eagle Pass. I'm talking about Eagle Pass.

JT: Yeah, it's right on down, but we used El Paso.

BM: Okay. So you never had to go to...

JT: Well, we had to go through it, but it was, they ran the Department of Labor.

BM: Okay. So basically what you had to do was go pick them up?

JT: Yeah, you were just more or less their shepherd from then on.

BM: Okay.

JT: Take care of them, see that they, you know, didn't have bad colds or something wrong. But I don't know who gave them the physicals, but they did receive at that center a physical, some description.

BM: Okay. And that would have been there at Eagle Pass?

JT: No, no in El Paso. Eagle Pass is a different area.

BM: Oh, okay. So they came in through...

JT: Yeah.

BM: El Paso.

JT: Um-hm.

BM: You're rubbing your microphone there. It's kind of got a little static when it does that. You talked a little bit about the housing. Can you describe the housing that you put the braceros in?

JT: Well, you wanted a house with, you had to have showers for them. They liked gas, propane, natural gas burners to cook their food on. You had to furnish all the utensils, and usually you had to have a mattress cover on your mattress. You had to have a comforter and a pillow and a pillowcase. And I think sheets and I think it was two blankets - that was federal requirement.

BM: Okay and was that here on your property?

JT: No. We had it on some of the lease property, too. A lot of the houses are still, I've got a place I bought, these Japanese people had, Mr. Hershel. And he built his house for them with big showers and it helped out a lot. And they were fireproof, he used cement block roof covered with tar and asphalt and gravel, but it made it where they could clean it good. It was just disastrous when they left. They'd steal a lot of things, your blankets, utensils, and all that unless you tried to as they quit check them in.

BM: And then you'd have to replace...

JT: And some of them just suddenly looked towards the south and say, Mama needs me, and want to quit.

BM: Uh-hm. (Chuckles) Okay. So all of the braceros that you hired stayed in a common dwelling?

JT: In a house or something. The U.S. Labor would come out and inspect them, so you always worried, will I qualify and are they keeping it good once you get them in the house?

BM: Now did they, was it mostly just the men who came or did they bring their families?

JT: No, they weren't allowed their families.

BM: They were not?

JT: Unh-uh. No, that, if you sponsored one, like I said before, you have to sponsor the wife and the kids, which we did in several of them. A lot of them you never

see them again. They working for you months, and they're gone once you sponsor them even then. It's no guarantee they're going to stay with you.

BM: Right. Okay. So, you mentioned earlier that when you brought them over you had to take them to get their groceries first, and that that was set up on credit. Now did they have to pay for their own groceries?

JT: No. As I said before, we took it out of their check. We advanced them their groceries.

BM: Okay. But it did...

JT: Because they didn't have any money to buy groceries.

BM: Right, but after they had started...

JT: Because we never, I never saw any peso exchanging done here because the ratio changed so fast, you just can't afford to get into it. It's strictly American dollar period, and then you'd send them money or whatever and they'd transfer it over there.

BM: Okay. So, if it came out of their check, then actually they did pay for it but it was more set up through...

JT: Yeah, you kept a log book on them. And then you'd pay them according to that. Usually you'd pay them on Saturday at noon, and then they'd go to town and buy their supplies for the next week, once you got them started on their own. Then we had different people, they had Catholics and Protestants that'd come out at night a lot of times and had services for them.

BM: What did they typically buy at the stores? What did they like to eat?

JT: Well, mainly they'd eat a lot of beans and they bought lots of white flour and onions, just basic commodities. They loved tomatoes, but they buy them always fresh, and green chile, if they could find it, and coffee and tea.

BM: Okay, you started to talk a little bit about the services that were held for them.

JT: Yes, some farmers wouldn't allow them on the place, but we always let them. They wanted to come out and talk to them and let them, if they wanted to hear them, they'd hear them, you know. Which, it was nice on the stand point of the community of having an interest in them.

BM: So, did they ever take off like on Sundays to go to church or...?

JT: I don't know. I don't think many of them went. As you, you're probably familiar with the Mexican people way, the women have the religion, so to speak. They do the going to church. They do all the inner part with religion, with the priest or the minister, whatever it is. The men are very negligent in not going to church, I'd say.

BM: Were there any occasions where you allowed them to have time off to celebrate like say a Mexican holiday?

JT: Well, you about got, you have to do that. In other words they're going to, in the May celebration and September celebrations, you'd better let them go. Mother's Day is another day that you'd better let them go, and the other thing is that working them on holidays like Good Friday is just almost a no-no with the real Mexicans in Mexico. They figure it's bad luck, and maybe it is. But with modern farming like we do, you can't stop, you got to keep going.

BM: Bad luck to work on Good Friday?

JT: No, it was, that was one day that the men were supposed to go to mass.

BM: I see. Okay.

JT: The other thing if one of them did have a wife in here, bring a wife in, and some of them married to U.S. citizens is, if a child or one of them is sick, you'd better drop everything and tend to it because they'll start walking to town if you don't take them. They get so up-geared. They're so, what would you say, responsive, they have such a responsive feeling for their family which is very well I think noted and should be considered by other people. But like, if every one of them dies and the family has a child the others take care of the child. They don't put it up for adoption, they don't have to. The family takes care of it.

BM: Okay. This is kind of changing the subject here, but did you ever have any immigration service or border patrol agents come and check on your people and were they checking to see if you met your requirements?

JT: No. The thing that they were after was wetbacks, ones that weren't legal.

BM: Okay.

JT: And that was about all they, and we ran into more when we got into chile picking in, hm I forget about what year we started about [19]62 with the ones that were

left, and they would hide the wetbacks in the chile wagon where they were dumping the chile. And one time they all got panicky, and I just happened to go by and you had a lot of immigration there checking them out. And what had happened, they had buried one down there and he quit breathing down under the chile, and they had to dig him out. Luckily the immigration gave him respiration, some treatment and got him out of that, but it was kind of a something you don't forget.

BM: I guess.

JT: But really there was respect both ways. We had good immigration people, I have to say. (Pause) As far as drugs I don't think I ever had any of the braceros on drugs at all, whereas today you can't say that. These _____ (??) we get to hire, this cabbie say it made my son feel bad one time he saw one shooting himself up with heroin and they said, What are you doing that for? Well, I work better. And it made it kind of bad. But they were, I'd say I never saw any of them use drugs. They used lots of their Mexican cigarettes that smelled pretty bad; they were so dried out, but they liked them.

BM: Was that tobacco cigarettes or funny cigarettes?

JT: Oh, they were, they have two types. One's a high priced one like ours and then they have a cheapie cigarette, and the cheapie is what they liked; more potent.

BM: Is that those _____ (??)...?

JT: Something like that.

BM: Yeah, they're kind of flattened out. I think they have sugar in the paper.

JT: A lot of them don't smoke, though. The worst part problem that the Spanish people have, the Mexican people, is diabetes. It's just terrible. One time in the hospital they took off eighteen legs in one day down there.

BM: Wow.

JT: It's just kind of hereditary, and our foreman right now he got sick a couple of weeks ago, and they got him straightened out. _____ (??) it just got too hot. But that's one thing. Tuberculosis is pretty high on the ones now. They gave ours physicals, but they can tell by looking at their fingernails whether you've got tuberculosis, it's usually real flat and thick, if you have it. Well, the

problem with those wetbacks is they go and work in the dairies and they'll give the TB to the cow. And you can't cure the cow, you've got to destroy her. And that's happened down there in El Paso County right now.

BM: Hm. I didn't know that.

JT: And I have a real good friend, immigration officer, he's retired and they didn't even pay him, and he was always kidding me but he just take them to the hospital when they picked them up to make sure that the ____ (??) didn't have TB.

BM: So, you said, you mentioned something about insurance, was that health insurance primarily that you were paying for the braceros?

JT: It was health and life in case they got killed on the spot or something like that.

BM: I see. Okay.

JT: Kind of similar to our Workman's Comp. That was another thing, it was getting so high and you could understand that, say we insure you for twenty dollars and the first time you go to the doctor it's more than that.

BM: Um-hm.

JT: And it's hard to balance insurance. You see that the government today is, How can you do that? or even insurance company, and with a farm you get five claims, you're through and you've got to find another company.

BM: Um-hm. Well, that's today. What was it like during the bracero program?

JT: Well, we had very good cooperation with the medical doctors and we had good insurance, but let's say it was starting to get too high because they wanted to go to the doctor if they just feel like they have a cold.

BM: And that would have been during the bracero program?

JT: Um-hm.

BM: Okay. Do you happen to remember what you were paying them?

JT: No, I was trying to think of that last night. I can't, I know we didn't pay them near what we pay today. And the, you didn't have that workman's deal we have now and unemployment. Every quarter you pay a fund to the state, no matter what state you're in, for your workers. And then if they happen to come and charge, can't get work, well they draw out of that fund. And if they draw too much, well, your fund, you'd have to almost pay them direct. But the states share

in that too. It gives them some protection. Of course, they've got that fly for work, you know, and try to find another job.

BM: But you're saying that is in effect today and was not in...

JT: Yeah, that's something you can't buy insurance to protect yourself as a grower.

BM: Okay. Do you happen to remember how wages were determined at the time that program was in effect?

JT: It was all the U.S. Department of Labor. I can't remember. I know the cotton picking, it was high. I think, as I recall it was two dollars a hundred to pick the upland and four dollars for _____ (??) , which is pretty high.

BM: Per a hundred pounds?

JT: Yeah.

BM: Okay.

JT: Labor, I don't know if it's a dollar and a half an hour or three and a half, I just can't remember. We had a big fire a few years ago, burned up our offices and all our records.

BM: Okay. But you did keep track of what you paid each worker?

JT: You had to really keep track of that, and just like IRS, you know, you've got to account with them more I guess than anything else but labor (??).

BM: And how did you that? Did you use like a ledger, book...?

JT: We had a little book and it had their, two copies in it. One for you and one for them. And you had them sign it that that was correct, and we had the rule if it's not, come back as soon as you can and we'll correct it. Because one thing, if one, they're very good on that, on accountability. If you underpay one, you'd get in trouble quick. In other words, if he says you owe him another hour or two hours, it's better just to pay him that than to try to say he's not entitled to it. You hurt his feelings and all that. You want him to feel that you're his beloved boss, or patron. The other thing I might mention, when you went to get the men, now I learned it almost too late, they want you dressed good. And they say, Look at my Patron over there. The guy with the brand new clothes on. That's my boss. And you have to remember that, that they take pride in their boss, which you don't find so much of that today.

BM: That's interesting. I've never heard that one before. Were you required to withhold any taxes or anything from their pay?

JT: I don't think they were into Social Security. Could have been, I don't...

BM: I wouldn't think so.

JT: I don't think so.

BM: We just were going on...

JT: I know they didn't have to pay any of their fees to come in or be re-contracted.

BM: Okay, but you probably would have taken their...

JT: Now once they became naturalized well, say halfway, they have to pay them.

BM: I see. But you would've taken their costs for their groceries out of their checks?

JT: Yeah, usually you never worried about that except the first time, and if he quit and ran away, you get stuck with it.

BM: Okay.

JT: Did help Mexico a lot because they sent practically every bit of the money back.

BM: Well, we talked about the fact that the Farm Bureau here administered the program, um, were there any other local agricultural organizations that you belonged to that had influence over the operation of the Bracero Program?

JT: No, our main one's always been the Farm Bureau. Now, there's just some kind of farmer's group started the one down at Burino (??) and Anthony area, with this Eli Gutierrez(??). And I don't know. It was over oh, some little squabble in the leadership that wouldn't affect the farmer.

BM: What was the name again?

JT: Eli Gutierrez (??) No I think, Eli(??). No, it wasn't neither. I can't, he had an Apodaca name; it was probably him. But anyway we didn't pay them much attention. Now when we went to trial in Washington trying to defend ourselves and being able to use them right and meet all the criteria, they went; that group was there, too and testified.

BM: And that would have been like a group to represent the braceros?

JT: No, we represented ourselves to use, a right to use the bracero. See the government said we didn't have any right to use them; we treated them bad, we didn't furnish this and that, which wasn't true at all.

BM: But the group from down south that you mentioned, Eli(??) Gutierrez or whatever?

JT: I don't think it was Eli, I mixed up there. It would be either, let's see what was that Apodaca you had?

BM: Epifacio(??) Apodaca.

JT: That'd be it.

BM: Okay. And what was his group called?

JT: He was a college graduate. We went to school together and he was a real fine man, but he sure knew how to select good people. Because you've got thousands standing around there in Mexico and you have to pick some, you know, how are you going to do it? And get somebody that will do the job properly for the farmer or the rancher. Now, occasionally you get cowboys. I had one of the best cowboy I ever saw. He could just throw any kind of rope the first time he had them caught. And then he got his wife over here from Juárez, and they were a nice family. They were so nice we'd even have them come in and eat with us and everything else. It was just really a good family. I don't know whatever happened to them.

BM: But the group that you mentioned down south of the farmers that Mr. Apodaca was...

JT: Yeah, it was a different labor association we'll say.

BM: Oh, it was a labor association?

JT: But in other words we had two in the county at the time which probably makes it better, you know, since we, people get mad at say at Farm Bureau they can go there, or they got mad there they can come to us in the Farm Bureau.

BM: So maybe it wasn't the Farm Bureau, it was some

JT: No, it wasn't the Farm Bureau. It was just a farmer's group.

BM: Okay. I think we already talked a little bit about the work that your braceros did. Did you have other crops that you hired braceros to harvest besides cotton?

JT: Some people did. They worked them in vegetables, lettuce and onions and that's the only vegetable, and then some of the dairies probably hired them, contracted them.

BM: But you personally were just growing cotton at the time?

JT: Cotton and alfalfa.

BM: Alfalfa? Okay. So, did you have them bailing hay and that's...?

JT: No, we usually had to do that ourselves. After that some of them were naturalized and I got two men that had been naturalized, and they could bail hay good, knew how to take care of the machinery.

BM: Can you tell me what a typical workday would be like for one of your braceros during the growing season and then during the harvesting season?

JT: We usually always, and it's still the same thing today, they want to work from seven to five. And we always with our workers, we didn't knock out the noon hour, give them that. You give them a little advantage there, they like you a little better. Of course now when you're picking cotton, it's a different ballgame because they are paid by piece-work, so much a pound, and that made it different. But some of them were, can make a lot of money. I had one I was trying to find his picture, he was a champion cotton picker. He could pick more cotton that I've ever seen in my life and every time you looked at him he was doing nothing. He just reached down and picked like magic and then straightened out and rubbed his back and get with it. Well, he went, he was a real good cement man. He said, "Put cement in this floor and it'd be perfectly level," just with his eyes, he just knew how to look and see it. He went to California. He come back with a new wife, talked perfect English. I think today he's on welfare, but I don't know.

BM: Do you happen to remember his name?

JT: Well, (Pause) I can't think, I'll think of it eventually.

BM: Okay, we can go back to that.

JT: We never really got too personal with our workers. I don't think a good employer should.

BM: What kind of tools did they use when they were working for you?

JT: I thought of the man, his name is Pablo Sanuz(??).

BM: Pablo Sanuz?

JT: S-a-n-u-z, or something like that. What was your question again?

BM: I was asking about what kind of tools they used to do their work for you.

JT: Well, usually all you get, each one wanted a brand new hoe if he's hoeing. He wanted a brand new cotton sack. He didn't want any second hand stuff from somebody else. And that was their pride, to have their tools. And you give them a shovel if they're irrigating. So it meant you had to have quite a bit of supplies there. They weren't too bad at stealing. Today the workers are so bad about stealing. We have a big onion shed, and there's something being stolen all the time, night and day. Or you'll see a guy come in, "What do you want?" "I'm looking for Joe Brown." "Well, we don't have a Joe Brown." Well, it's just a copout to get in there and steal. They'll steal anything because they go through and take it to flea market. This area's flea market today is Deming mainly. You go over there with your chains and your chainsaws and anything that'll sell. Used to be they would never steal anything you work with. Today it's the other way around.

BM: Interesting. Did you ever have to provide them with gloves or hats or anything like that?

JT: Supply boots to irrigate, rubber boots. No, they didn't, we didn't have to furnish gloves because a lot of them won't wear gloves except welding and we didn't have any braceros there. We got some workers now, Mexicans, that are professional mechanics and welders.

BM: So, we already talked a little bit about some of the other work that you had braceros do _____. (??).

JT: They helped build some of the houses to live in. There were, some of the real good ones in construction, like I mentioned they could lay cement floor and not even have to have a level, magnificent that they can do.

BM: And those were braceros that worked for you?

JT: Yeah.

BM: Okay and where did they build those houses?

JT: Oh, on different places that we had rented from corporations or landlords.

BM: Did you have them drive tractors or trucks or anything like that?

JT: No trucks or anything because a lot of them didn't have a license to do that. They drove the tractors, you don't have to have a license for a tractor.

BM: Okay. Did they operate any other agricultural machines?
JT: Not at that time.
BM: Okay. How much contact did you have with the braceros?

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

BM: (It seems that part of the tape is missing here??) On their time off?
JT: Visit each other. Usually you had none on the premises on Saturday afternoon and Sunday, they'd vanish and they're back on Monday morning.
BM: Would they like go to the bars or what would they do?
JT: Most of them didn't drink too much. They had a welcome in bar here, they'd go to that and it's still in existence.
BM: What did they do for fun?
JT: Well, a lot them liked to pitch washers or dollars. And they'd cut a hole in the sidewalk and bet each with other that, and they just loved to do that. And we had one that, he made jewelry out of silver spoons and coins. He could make you a beautiful ring out of a quarter just by tapping it with a spoon. And it made our spoons disappear quick, too. They had to furnish, and then the Labor Department come and they want to see a tablespoon, a fork and a knife, and you had to have that. They never used them, but you had to have them.
BM: Were they generally stainless steel, or were they...?
JT: We just bought, I'd say stainless steel. But you'd hear a thump-thump noise in their hall, he'd be over there making a ring or something. We had a big labor house back at our place here, and they were always in there doing something like that. Sometimes you would get mean ones that would buy guns and try to shoot up the place, but as a whole they were pretty good.
BM: Did you give them any special privileges?
JT: What do you mean by that?
BM: Well, I didn't write this question, but...

JT: You favor them? Yeah, you tend to pull the ones that are more efficient out and give them a more trustworthy job we'll say.

BM: Okay. So, maybe a little bit...

JT: That's where the two (??) this _____ (??) Rafael, I called the other one there, they became my best tractor men.

BM: Best tractor men?

JT: That's why they left; they got so good. We had one of them, and we had a local man making rows and he just couldn't do a good job and we trained this fella and he could do twice the work in a day.

BM: So, it was more a responsibility and probably a little bit more money?

JT: They'd be paid more, but they'd get _____ (??) more hours, too. That's what people don't understand. Like irrigating; why would you work a man the long hours? Well, as long as he waters it right, you don't care if he sleeps on the job or what. It's doing their job.

BM: You mentioned earlier that they would get time off for holidays like the Cinco de Mayo and so on. Were those paid vacations?

JT: No, they were on their own. The other thing I might say is if somebody gets sick in Mexico, they want to go and you just about got to let them go. You can't stand in the way or they'll quit you.

BM: That's like a relative?

JT: Yeah. Because we had one of them and he always was going to see his mother. And I said, "Well, she died five years ago. What's going on?" And teasing, but it was a matter I think of taking flowers to her grave or something that he had to do. He had a responsibility to...

BM: So she really had died five years ago?

JT: But that wasn't the point. It was the point that he wanted off to go.

BM: I see.

JT: Because it's Mother's Day or, we only had one in all the time I've ever had them that was really, what I'd say, interesting in you getting ahead. And if he saw something out of line, he'd call 911, get the police in there, take care of things.

Most of them will not do that. They don't want to be involved. Today it's the same thing.

BM: Okay. Do you happen to know what they did on that holidays? I mean if they have like Cinco de Mayo, did they go to local celebrations or did...?

JT: No, they'd mostly go to Mexico and Juárez. Now you haven't asked where the best ones came from.

BM: Well, I was just getting to that.

JT: Oh, you're getting there. Most of them come from Chihuahua to Delucias (??), below Chihuahua, in those irrigated areas.

BM: Delucias?

JT: Um-hm. Down there by Boquia Dam (??). I went down there one time, and they farmed similar to we, our farming. I was probably some ugly American down there calling the shots, but anyway they'll have five or six standing at the end of the field just sitting, hoping that whoever's that tractor do something and go get his job. They have so much labor down there it's just, you get in third world countries it's that way. You get down in Nicaragua and down there, I've been in there and it's just *thousands* of them on the side of the road, nothing to do. I don't know how they survive. It's just pathetic.

BM: I guess their economy is not quite as good as ours.

JT: Well, I could mention Mexico City, we'll say right now, we'll say thirty million people there. How do they make a living? How do they get you know, it just baffles me. Say Baghdad, right now, what do those people live on? How do they make a living?

BM: Probably a lot of them aren't right now.

JT: But you know everybody has to eat and wear clothes.

BM: Well, that's true. We may have covered this already, but I'm going to ask it since it's on the list. When the contract ended say for your cotton pickers, what did they do?

JT: You'd have to take them to town to the Farm Bureau office and check them in. Then they'd have a bus take them to the border, release them. It was funny one day we had one, he did get drunk and raise Cain and, "Go *home!*" So they sent

him home. He sobered up and he got on the other side of the border, “What am I doing here?”

BM: (Laughs)

T; He couldn’t get back then. But they’re real strange. Like we used to grow lots of sheep. I say a lot, we had a sheep herd. Very seldom do we find anybody who likes to take care of animals, that’s one of the weaknesses of the Spanish and Mexicans, but they’re either real perfectionist, they don’t want to do it. But say a water hut, you tell him, “Go water the sheep.” And he’d go over and turn the faucet on and he’d pass out, tired or something, and you’d see the water flooding and you’d go cut it off. He’d say, “Why’d you shut the faucet off?”, he’d wake up hearing you do it, “Well, it’s not running now.” So the moral of the story is let them see what the problem is before you correct it.

BM: Okay.

JT: But they liked Germans if they’re trained in any profession, they want to do that and they’re usually very good at it. Whereas silly Americans, we think we’re experts in everything and we aren’t at anything, you know.

BM: Jack of all trades and master of men. Did any of your braceros ever like move over to help somebody else with their harvest?

JT: Yes, we’d loan each other’s out. And I got in trouble one time. The farmer thought I should pay him and he’d come to me and says can you work my braceros, I’ve run out of work, doctors, I don’t know.

BM: I have the same problem occasionally. I’m going to put a little introduction on this one too since this is a new disc. This is Beth Morgan. It’s April the 23rd 2003. I’m visiting with John Tomlin at his home near Las Cruces, New Mexico and this interview is for the Bracero Oral History Project, and I going to have to get you to remind me what we were talking about.

JT: I think it’s mainly the recreation, what they did for recreation. Most of them wanted to come in and work. I can tell you the story of one that, whose son and him take their whole cotton crop for us one fall. I was doing some practice teaching in, over at Deming. And they’d had me harvested quicker than I ever had. The only thing was they wanted to be paid in silver dollars. Of course, you

could get them easy, and today I'd doubt if you could go down and get three hundred dollars of silver dollars at the bank. They'd laugh at you.

BM: Yeah.

JT: So anyway, they took this money and went back to Juárez and bought trucks and went into the trucking business. One of them brought a truck up and showed it us one time. He was so proud of getting ahead. Then I had one from Delucias, he put in a grocery store. He got home, he liked the way our grocery stores worked here. So he set up the same way.

BM: That's interesting.

JT: One went into the fruit business. _____ (??) put in apple trees in all of our big five gallon buckets he could find, and we'd use for different commodities. Well, he took them down there and he used as smudge pots and keep the apples from getting frozen. Some of them were workers were totally different from what we've been talking about, very high class. But you'd never know it by looking at them. And one of my neighbors, he had one. He went down to see his home in Juárez. It was the finest home, one of the finest in Juárez. He was an aristocrat just over here making money. Had a butler and everything else. So you can't judge the book by the color. (Chuckles).

BM: Or the cover either, for that matter. (Chuckles) Okay, we had been talking a little bit about whether any of your workers went over and helped somebody else when they were done with the work that you had hired them to do.

JT: We tended to usually borrow the other guys as our, we started to rent more land at that time towards the end of the Bracero Program. It was hard to get enough men, and then you always had a certain percent wouldn't stay out their contract. They'd just leave. As far as their health, I only had one out of the thousands of them I probably worked that was allergic to cotton. He just broke out in a terrible rash and they sent him back. They told him he had the option of getting sipline clothes like the Army uses, they haven't one now then. But that's the only one I ever saw like that.

BM: So did he do that or...?

JT: No, he went back.

BM: I wonder if that would work. It seems like you'd still get it on you somehow.

JT: Um-hm. Usually cotton is very sanitary, we'll say. It's like a newspaper. If you ever have to lay somebody out that's hurt or something, and you don't have sheets or anything, use newspaper. It was sterile than anything you can get because of the ink. That's what a doctor told me one time.

BM: Why is that?

JT: Uh, it was a talk of the skill. It was one of these men here this Rafael here, he was a champion fisher. He didn't need a pole; he'd just get down in the drainage and throw those fish up to you as fast as can be. He'd catch them like magic. You know that's a skill.

BM: Are there fish in the irrigation ditches?

JT: He's the one that is today one of the professional lettuce packer. They have to pack the lettuce in the box a certain way. And they work as a team in those lettuce crews.

BM: I had no idea there were fish in the ditches.

JT: Yeah, there's fish in there. We lost a lot of good ones one year. Some guy dumped some toxic waste in them, killed all the fish.

BM: What did it do to your crops?

JT: No, it was going on towards Texas in the winter time.

BM: Oh, I see. Okay. Well, there you go; that's one of the things that some of them did with their free time I suppose. Did he ever cook up any of those fish for you?

JT: No. We worked a few black people then, and they would fish a lot in the drainages on their time off and that made the Mexicans watch them and want to fish too.

BM: I see. Okay.

JT: But the black people, they'd rather have the carp than the bass. There's a special way to cook carp that makes them taste good, same way with crawdads.

BM: Hm. Okay, yeah because my dad when he was fishing, he'd take the carp and cut it up for bait.

JT: Um-hm.

BM: He didn't care to eat the carp. Okay, I'm kind of going back to my list here. What were your obligations to the workers at the end of the work contract?

JT: To see that they were checked in properly.

BM: And that would have been through the Farm Bureau?

JT: Yeah.

BM: Okay. And did you have any understanding with them that you would rehire them if they came to work again?

JT: Yes. We liked to get the same crew back if we could. Like say you, if they worked for me this year, I'd say, "Can you come back next year?" And they would write letters. We'd correspond with them.

BM: But that was not required?

JT: Oh, no. This is personal. This is on the side.

BM: Okay.

JT: As far as the government helping you there, they would, you know, man to man. They didn't, you couldn't, but usually they kind of stayed in the background and let our people that we had at the Farm Bureau do the selecting and handling.

BM: Who stayed in the background?

JT: The U.S. Department of Labor.

BM: I see. Okay. What was the procedure for extending or renewing a contract?

JT: They were only allowed so many months or years in the countries, I vaguely recall, and they could use that up, but it was just an extension. Now I remember one, he had to go back, as well as all of them, he stayed so long he had to go back to Mexico for thirty days or something and then he could be renewed.

BM: Um-hm.

JT: And he come back. And he's riding in the bus up there and he looked and his girlfriend was driving his truck with somebody else in it, a different man. So when they got home then, after checking out, well, he took my tractor and ran the car she was in. And I said, "Well, you hurt my tractor and hurt the car. Nobody had (??) to teach the lady a lesson now step (??) out on me."

BM: (Laughs)

JT: It was strange people.

BM: Didn't like that?

JT: They learned, though, the ropes; what they can do and what they can't do. I guess anybody would.

BM: So did you have braceros that came to work for you every year?

JT: Yeah.

BM: The same ones?

JT: Um-hm.

BM: And how many years would you say you had one the longest?

JT: Well, you must realize we legalized them then, when the bracero program quit. And I have one that's, he's just retired and I guess from I want to say [19]48 straight on through.

BM: He's still...

JT: Been employed. Yeah.

BM: ...worked for you...

JT: Yeah.

BM: ...until he retired?

JT: A good employee if you can get them, you about got to buy the business to get them and then they're going to quit. A good worker doesn't come and knock on the door for work. He has work unless something happens.

BM: Um-hm.

JT: And that's the hard one. Where do you get good help? You can't go to the Employment Office, they don't know. They're different. They're just in there stalling in most cases. But some of them were real good at the beginning were wetbacks and they came in and worked for you and then they'd say, Well, if you have any wetbacks bring them down, and we'll give them passes.

BM: Well, that was after the Bracero Program.

JT: No, it was during the Bracero Program, at the beginning.

BM: Okay.

JT: And that way you knew they'd work because you'd take old Juan down there that could irrigate perfect and not leave a dry spot and not flood you out. You wanted

him. It's the same way(??) with any worker, you know, you've got good and bad, I don't care whether they're PHD's or ditchdiggers.

BM: So would you say that there were several that you had work for you for more than a year?

JT: Oh, yeah.

BM: Okay. So you kind of got to get to know them and you wanted the same ones.

JT: Yeah, we'd tend, like if you had a good crew to pick cotton, we wanted to get them back if we could. I know we had five brothers one time, and they were excellent. We got them back. And then we used to get a lot of, they were pickle pickers that worked in Michigan and states like that. And you get to knowing them and then they get through up there, just timed perfect they'd go to work in the cotton. And I had one of them was a champion picker, and they'd give a new Stetson hat if he could win. He got scared and wouldn't enter, too bashful.

BM: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

JT: About why he was bashful?

BM: Well, or the contest.

JT: No, different stores would donate things, and they donate say a hundred dollar Stetson hat, today it's probably four hundred dollar hat, and whoever's the champion got that hat and then they had down to maybe the fifth place and they'd have it on somebody's farm.

BM: What did the contest consist of?

JT: Just picking the cotton, who could the most in an hour, we'll say.

BM: I see. Okay. You mentioned a little earlier this gentleman who borrowed your tractor to ram his girlfriend's vehicle with; um did you have any other problems with braceros?

JT: Well, some of them have more, several wives, and that was probably going, wanting to go and send money orders and didn't have enough money and I guess human factors that were, they didn't have anything to do with the work.

BM: Right.

JT: Their private lives is what I guess you'd call it.

BM: Several wives, huh?

JT: Um-hm.

BM: Is that legal in Mexico?

JT: Well, I don't know is it legal here? They probably do.

BM: (Laughs) Maybe they were Mormon braceros.

JT: There's a lot of Mormons in Mexico. There's a lot of black Mexicans too. There's a big area in Juárez that's all black, and we used to use them chili picking. They're real good workers, but a lot of them would go to Roswell area where they'd right now even, because they have good facilities to keep them and they like to not have to go home at night, have a bed there. The other thing I never understood is a lot of those legalized in Juárez, why won't they live up here? What's the advantage? The foods cheaper in some cases, but, you know, all the bother and getting up early and catching the bus and all that, you know, they'll go out at two in the morning and finally get on the bus, they want to come up here on to work or the day crew chief. And they, it looks like it'd be more profitable to live up here.

BM: Well, it might be, but I guess _____ (??) not everybody wants to be an American.

JT: And then you go out to L.A. and say how far do you live and work, and they'll say, Oh, fifty minutes. Everything's in minutes, you know, not miles.

BM: Well, I guess it's probably about the same, maybe a little bit longer depending on where the farm is from Juarez to here. (Tape Interruption??) There were some braceros that wanted to shoot up the place?

JT: Well, you'd always have that. We had one, one time, and we had a big crew and it rained and one of them slipped out of the house. Of course they all Johnny their so-and-so Jose bought a pistol and he's shooting at everybody, shot all the lights out of the house and all that. So I called the Sheriff's office, and I said, "You come pick this man up. He's going to hurt somebody." They were too scared to come out. So I thought well, I was young and frisky and Veteran and all that, so I went over took a rifle away from him. He come right at me and I said, "Well, you know it's got a bullet in it, so don't come any farther." And he stopped. So then we called the police and Sheriff, and they come and got him, sent him back to Mexico. But that was the only one I ever had that was a direct contact with his

gun, and I said to the police, “What do you want to do with that rifle?” - it was a rifle, not a pistol – I never saw one that was so accurate when you shot it. It just seemed like it hit everything you pointed it at. And they said, You can keep it. So I gave it to my son, and in later years somebody stole. So I don’t know where it is, maybe it went back to Mexico or somewhere.

BM: That’s kind of interesting.

JT: There’s lots of stories, but they’d probably have to be too vulgar to print, you know.

BM: (Laughs). So would you say that that particular gentleman was drunk and...?

JT: Yeah. He just kind of went insane. You’ll have that. We had one other one, one time. They always get mean when it rainstorms because they can’t work.

BM: Oh.

JT: And he shot the lights out of the house. They tend to want to shoot the lights out drunk. And he was with a crew of about five that were real good pickers, too. But the ones that were pickle pickers, they had a great big old green pickle pin on them from Michigan.

BM: (Laughs) Did you ever have any other criminal behavior from any of your braceros?

JT: Well...

BM: Like stealing or...?

JT: Sometimes you’d, they’d get drunk or something would be put up in the jail that you’d never know about it. They’d never tell you, you know. They’d say, Oh, mama’s sick. Had to take care of her. They’re really in jail there. (??)

BM: So they might have been like absent from work for a few days until they let them out or something?

JT: Yeah. But usually they’re real hustlers. I had one, one time. He was what we call a bread-eater, he don’t eat anything but bread, no meat. I don’t know whether he was really a vegetarian, but anyway he ran everywhere, too. Just way down below Mexico City, this big guy about six foot three and when he hit with a hoe, there’s no weed left on him(??). But anyway, it started raining and I was downtown and I thought, “Well, surely he has sense enough to quit working.”

And I came home and he's hoeing weeds on the side of the road in the rain, just pouring down rain. He had yellow raincoat on – I didn't know he had a raincoat. And his hoe's just a big round ball of mud, but he's at it.

BM: (Chuckles) What were the, well, did the braceros ever complain to you about the living conditions?

JT: No. They'd never had that good of living conditions in most cases.

BM: What about their wages?

JT: No. No problem there, except when I say that, You missed an hour, you misfigured my wage, and you better check it over. We had one, one time you could say a hundred and fifty and he'd add it in his head and give you a total, just like a machine. How'd he do it? I studied that man and I never figured out how smart he was, you know, how he got to be that way.

BM: Some people just have talents.

JT: Well, I had a friend that was going to be governor and he went to California and took a course on gesture reading and he could tell whether they were lying and all that, you know. You'd be quiet there(?) for a while. And then I had a friend, he could tell everything, and we come to find out he was a lip reader after he died. He could read your lips. But anyone, going back to the man that hoed when it rained, he just suddenly after that, a week or two, disappeared and never came back. He got his check and was gone. We still have that. You'll pay a guy or woman and they'll vanish. And then they'll file charges on you now and say, Well, you fired me. We didn't fire them. And the Labor Department will say, "Well, do have evidence you gave warning you were going to fire them?" I said, "I didn't fire them." They won't take your word; they'll take the worker's word. I just let it fly, don't get hung up on it. Just agree.

BM: (Chuckles) Okay.

JT: But one thing _____ (?) though is the respect of the employer. The respected one was the one who was well-dressed, clean and put up a good appearance so they could be proud of that employer.

BM: Did the braceros or any of your braceros ever have a strike or a labor protest in this area?

JT: Yes. We had one, one time. I got a full crew to pick this field, and I went over, they quit. They're all just sitting around, We don't work here, no good; work no good. There was one guy, they called him the Arab, and he'd the instigator. So they all quit. There was nothing we could do. We got the Labor Department, came out to the farm and talked to them and people from the association. They said, We'll just deport all. And we couldn't get a refund on that – and that's one reason you start not liking to work them.

BM: What was their problem?

JT: Just this instigator stirred them up. I think he wanted to go home, and he thought he'd have some fun. And they listened to him. But it's kind of embarrassing to have that happen.

BM: Do you happen to remember what year that was?

JT: It'd been there towards the end, about [19]63.

BM: Okay.

JT: They were beginning too to get to where you hired one, if he couldn't make the minimum wage, you'd have to pay the difference. And with the cotton picker coming, it was so much more efficient than a man picking it off the stalk. What sold us on the picker, we're picking the pima (??) cotton, the extra long staple cotton, and they were paying about four dollars a hundred to pick it, which is a lot of money. Well, they brought the new machine out and said, Where do you want to try it? I said, "Let's go over there where they just got through picking the pima (??)." And we get almost as much as they had gotten on a row they'd left. And the other disadvantage of them, say you had forty of them or fifty of them running across the field picking, they want to stay in line, move accordingly. Well, one of them will just miss picking to keep in touch, keep in stride with the rest of them. They like to work in groups.

BM: That's interesting.

JT: It's hard to get them to spread out, and you're hoeing the field. They all just want to stay together. And they want to spread out. It's kind of a bad thing, it takes a real good foreman to get them to where they'll break up and go their route and not buddy-up with everybody else.

BM: Is that because they like to visit while they work?

JT: Yeah. I think so, and it's just a get to the boss.

BM: (Laughs) Just to get to the boss?

JT: That's right. In a labor union they usually have four workers and one boss. And like I worked for this farm for this guy who's a *big* contractor out in Dallas, with _____ (??) construction, and he was always telling about how much better it usually was if wanted a brick wall well(??) he'd hire them and it was perfect. He picked somebody up on the street. They don't know really what they're doing, you get shabby work, and that was why he liked the unions. You got professional work because that supervisor watches them. But the disadvantages to the union, like if you go to hire somebody, like when I was involved with the state in agriculture, you have to be sure that you their union spokesman there or you're in trouble. And one time, we were going to hire a new assistant for a county and I was on this committee a few years ago, and they said, Oh, we got, this is going to be simple. You go on home. You need to get home. Well, they interviewed the guy and didn't hire him and then they all had to go to court. The labor union sued them because he didn't have his spokesman there. And I didn't have to go because they let me go that day. I lucked out.

BM: Interesting.

JT: But the Civil Rights training is quite interesting. Look, you cannot use the word wetback in reference to like in Civil Rights, it's bad. But here they don't know really that that's what we called that didn't have documentation, bracero or whatever, had to have some evidence. Like we do in our office here today; most of them we'll make a copy of all their cards and what-not and driver's license and have a permanent record.

BM: Okay.

JT: You did have after, when it was shifted into Social Security of them trying to use each other's numbers, and then the government would catch up with it. And one of them had three numbers, and they caught up with him, but they said, Well, he had a big family. We got him a good job now; he won't have to use the other two.

BM: Interesting. Okay. Did you ever have a situation where you had both braceros and undocumented workers at the same time?

JT: Oh, I'm sure we did. They don't hold it against each other.

BM: They don't?

JT: No, they protect each other. If he has a falsified card, they're not going to tell you. Mexico's strange. You might be riding in a bus down in Mexico, and if they have a wreck, the driver runs away, leaves it. It's a strange philosophy there. We had a wreck out in front of our house one time. The road was wet. I went to look at it, and it turned upside down the car all full of braceros. And I called it in. When he got there, nobody was left but the driver that owned the car, the rest fled.

END OF SIDE A, TAPE 2

BM: Maybe they were not braceros. Maybe they were undocumented.

JT: They could have been wetbacks. Most cases, though, the only one that bothered the wetback was the immigration officer. And there's a big dairy up the road, it was real funny they knew this border patrolman - real find fellow – and he went to their farm and looked for Juan or whoever it was that was supposed to have been there and he couldn't find him and after he left, they were all laughing and I said, "What was wrong?" Juan was up in the tree hiding above the immigration officer.

BM: (Chuckles) So they had their ways of dealing.

JT: I know one immigration officer say, "What bothers me is my mother lives over by Arizona and she's always feeding the wetbacks, and I have to pick them up." But she won't let anybody go hungry.

BM: So you would say then that the braceros and the undocumented workers got along pretty well?

JT: Um-hm. Well, the thing about the Mexicans, it's like I mentioned when the president opened the border and let them come over free and get the crop out, was it just showed how the farmers had to have them. We hadn't mechanized enough yet, and we had to have them to get the crops in. But the farmers all were making a living; today, they're all going broke. It's just terrible. There's a boy across the

river the other day, he'd farmed his grandfather's farm, and he just had to shut her down; bank's cut him off. Put all of his equipment to sale; it just sold for nothing. Just terrible. You probably had, you didn't have chemicals either for weed control like today, and so they filled in the part. The short hoe came after the Bracero Program.

BM: Short hoe?

JT: Yeah, see it's illegal now. If you give a hoe to a man, if it doesn't have a four foot handle on it, you could be sent to penitentiary. That's a real hefty fine because it might give him back injury. It's okay for you to work in the garden with a short hoe, but not to hire somebody.

BM: I see. Okay. In general, what would you say was the quality of the work that the braceros did for you?

JT: They did real good work. I think the reason for it as I told you the other day, I think they had a much higher IQ. You go down to the unemployment here, you'd get some guy that was mentally deranged or drug addict or something that didn't care, all he wants is the money. These fellas wanted to please you, especially if they knew like they were wet and knew they had a program you could get them legalized to get them a card to work. They respected it. The only thing, like some of these that I've showed in pictures, once they'd work so long for you, they felt the responsibility was over so they would leave. And there's no way you could keep them. And I guess with workers, if they want to leave you, you just ought to let them go. We had that with landlords, too. They get mad at you, farming over nothing, they better, if you're not appreciated, go; same with your job; If you're not appreciated in say three years, you better look elsewhere. Now I don't know what percentage of Social Security of those that are legalized half-way is going to Mexico now, but I know a lot of it is. America is, takes care of the foreigners sometimes better than the locals. We find that in churches, too. Missionary work, they're people starving in the country and yet it's going to someplace a whole lot of other money is coming in. They all liked to get Singer sewing machines. You could tell they were getting ready to leave, too. They had to take a Singer sewing machine home. They'd pay high money for that.

BM: Did you ever, well, you said that they didn't bring their families, right?

JT: Um-hm.

BM: Okay. Would you have any way of comparing the quality of work that the braceros did to say the work of...

JT: The locals?

BM: Joe Blow off the street here? Yeah, the locals.

JT: There wasn't any comparison.

BM: There weren't any locals.

JT: You had no workers, locals to work.

BM: Okay. And why was that?

JT: I don't know. Why is it today that we don't have, I haven't seen an anglo come here and want work in a long, long time. I don't know what's happening in the United States. Why don't they want to work on the farm? Like one of the Spanish people said, "Oh, my father has such a hard time." I says, "Look, he's making more money than my daughter is teaching school at Hatch." And you think he's just a peon and all that, he's highly paid, making good money.

BM: As a farm worker?

JT: As a farm worker. Make \$25,000.00 or so a year, that's nothing to laugh at. But they still didn't see it that way. Most of the ones that were processed, their children didn't stay on the farm. They got as far away from them as they could because they considered it peon work, as they called it. And then some of them you'd ask them, What's your father doing _____ (??) ? He's a peon, just a low on the totem pole. It's hard to take because here we, well I know one family had an old boy, he was so smart, he was one of the top scientists at White Sands then. Folks are _____ (??) than _____ (??) mice. It just shows Americans can get ahead. One of the ones that's a bracero that retired from me, I didn't sponsor him to legalize but someone else did, he had a son a few years ago that took civil engineering out here at New Mexico State. He got through in two and a half years; his first job is \$62,000 in New Jersey. And that's what I say, that's the quality of people who work on a farm with those kind of brain cells. There's a lot of them that way. There was one of our county agents(??), "What does your

father do?” “Oh, he come in as a wetback; got to be a Mexican National.” He retired here a while back as county agent.

BM: Do you have any idea why these people were so smart or what attracted people...?

JT: They had not had any opportunity to show it, I think. But I know some, we had some of them when I was in the Army come in to Ft. Bliss. They had a program; they’d teach them English in two weeks, similar to Peace Corps, and they learned it. They come back real decorated and everything, and they offered a lot of them citizenship. I don’t know how many took it. One of them I got to know real well, and he went to New Mexico State and I said, “What are you going to do?” He said, “I guess I’ll have to go back and be a bullfighter. That’s where the money is.” (Chuckles).

BM: Was he one of the educated ones?

JT: Um-hm.

BM: Interesting.

JT: They made good soldiers a lot of them. They’ll do their job.

BM: Did you notice any animosity between the braceros and other farm employees?

JT: Hmm. No, we did with local Spanish-Mexican people. They didn’t like them because they got a lot of favors, favors they thought they were entitled to, but the argument is why didn’t they get out and do it? But a lot of times they were criticized on the farm for stoop laboring - like I mentioned - a lot of that time you add up what they got in a year, they did pretty good. It’s not a cheap stoop labor; they were rewarded well. One thing that helps them is they can put in more hours and make more money.

BM: Would you say that’s now or during the Bracero Program?

JT: Always with them.

BM: Always? Okay.

JT: It helped Mexico, too, by having these guys come in. They took the ideas, a lot of it, back to Mexico like to Delucias and down there by Boquia and Chihuahua and, farming techniques.

BM: Um-hm. Okay. In your opinion, were there other advantages and/or disadvantages to the Bracero Program?

JT: The disadvantage was having to comply with the U.S. Department of Labor's requirements - abnormal high ceilings, too much heat for the house with a lot of men, just too restrictive.

BM: Um-hm. And what were the advantages?

JT: Well, labor.

BM: Just having the labor?

JT: Yeah. We get the crop harvested. Of course cotton was worth a lot more, too. The farmer made a lot more profit per acre than he does today. I got a fact sheet(??) from University here now, and there's just some of these crops there's no money in it. Like this wheat _____ (Inaudible tape) _____ (??) can only make eleven dollars an acre profit. It's terrible. In cotton they say you'll lose a hundred dollars an acre growing it, costs you sixty-two cents to grow it, and sell it for forty-eight cents, you know, it doesn't work very good to have like the guy that bought cantaloupes and sold them for the price he paid for them, didn't make any money. His brother said, "Well, we should have bought a bigger truck, got a bigger load then." _____ (??) make some money.

BM: I guess. What would you say led to the fact that the program ended?

JT: The restrictions and the federal government. It might have been an indirect thing from the Unions, you can't ever tell. But we had no serious _____ (??) activity in this state that I knew of.

BM: Okay. Or anything like that?

JT: We had armed local crews. There was one that had probably been in the seventies that they had objected to children setting out in the field with onion harvesters. And the ones that objected were the Department of Labor in New Mexico that were out there rioting, and we got that all corrected. Today or just to give you an example of how severe the U.S. Department of Labor is, they say that a worker should have an hour off for lunch, regardless if he wants it or not. And if you hire a labor crew and they don't let them, in piece work even picking chili or, you don't give them an hour off to rest, you're subject to about a two thousand dollar

starting fine, which I have paid. And I hired a crew, for example, and I didn't pay any attention to this piece work, and I just paid the crew chief. He come in and want pay, and I paid him. Well, they watched the place for five days, the labor people, binoculars way off and they saw this crew weren't taking a full hour. Well, why should they take a full hour? They're on their own. We're not nurse maiding them. But that's how government rules can get to be so out of line.

BM: Okay. Would you like to see the Bracero Program or something like in reinstated?

JT: Well, it probably will have to come eventually, but how do you it get to where it's not side of a regulations against you? You see there's no way that the farmer, the rancher can file against a worker for poor work or let him go for poor work. And you're going to have it. And the same thing, all the protection is against the employer. There's nothing that the worker has to sign and say, "I'll abide by this and this." That's the disadvantage.

BM: And if it were reinstated, you would want something like that?

JT: I think it'd be good. We need new blood in the system; we're running out of it. Just like these old men now that were brought in and halfway naturalized, most of them never got naturalized, but they're dying off. Who's going to replace them? And your average person won't come out from the town and work. We used to get football players in the summer. No, they're not going to do that. They'd rather walk a treadmill. And then a lot of them used to haul ice out for refrigerators, no, you don't have anybody wanting to work. And I don't think you want to force them to work on the farm. They won't do good. They'd be like the German prisoner, he might _____ (??) all day pick, he had so much he had work, and they'd keep them after dark until they picked enough cotton to qualify. Say they picked only a hundred pounds, they had to pick a hundred and twenty-five, it was kind of hard on them. They're nice, young-looking boys that, men but yet they didn't want to work; they didn't have the know-how. Now I had an old buddy, he was from Pennsylvania, an engineer. And he come out in his motorcycle, I might try picking that cotton. You know that rascal could pick more than anybody I ever saw. His hands just like lightning. He had skill. You'd

never know. There was an old woman down the road here, she'd go out in the afternoon and pick four hundred pounds of cotton. I said, "Why do you do it?" "I just love to pick it."

BM: (Chuckles). Interesting.

JT: Just a skill. Fast.

BM: Interesting. Well, Mr. Tomlin this is about all the questions I have for you. Was there anything that we haven't covered that you'd like to talk about?

JT: Well, I think it made a living for the small grocers and mercantile people in the area. Today, we're tending to drift away from that with mass, gigantic people like Walt-Mart and Sam's that are in there and people are, times are hard so they go for the cheaper price. Before you had the little groceries and these Mexicans, braceros, that's where they want to trade. You really wouldn't like to go in a big store. So it helped out that little store and it gave them a lot of livelihood, too, along with the farmer.

BM: Is there anyone that you think I should interview in particular that you can think of?

JT: I don't know. They've all died off, I think.

BM: Is Mr. Bigby, is he still around?

JT: Who?

BM: Mr. Bigby.

JT: Uh, he's a rancher. He didn't use them.

BM: He did not?

JT: No, he's not from here. In the Hatch area, are you getting up in there?

BM: Yeah, I think. Anyone up there you think I should call?

JT: Most of them have quit. When I was starting to farm, I couldn't rent land or anything. They said, Oh, (unintelligible). You went to college to learn how to farm? I didn't have to go to college to learn how to farm.

BM: (Laughs)

JT: So it made us kind of have a hard time at farming to get ahead. These young people today, the trends change and you got a lot more younger people in agriculture due to the mechanization, I'm sure. And your new chemicals, like your cotton this, it got plugged in through the gene to make it yield more and keep the insects off of it. The only disadvantage is China and these foreign countries are getting it and flooding the market with more supplies, and then agriculture is bad. Twenty years ago or so you could go buy the best pick-up for \$3400, now it's \$34,000 the similar truck and you're selling cotton cheaper like pima, which sells for about eighty-three cents. We got a dollar twenty then. And we grew a lot of pima cotton. Long staple, mainly it goes into the thread industry. But times just change, and I don't see how the American farmer can succeed unless he's just in some other business using it as a write-off for taxes because you can't farm and keep losing. And we're having this problem now we have probably the most elaborate onion equipment out here to grade onions and all that, but if we don't get enough price, we sell to Walt Mart, too. But the only there, we have to ship in their box - it's a green beautiful box - that folds together flat to ship and then fill it with the onions and ship it to their terminal or they won't go to Las Lunas. They want it shipped to Houston. And so most all that goes there, and then that box we have to pay a dollar thirty-five there. We could buy a baseboard one for a dollar and a quarter. But to sell to them you mail pineapples the same way. Only they use a paper box. They sand, there's several of these big outfits you'll think you're good this year, next year you're maybe bankrupt. What's hurt us is a lot of the people that we ship to bellied up and they need to have protection for, that's what the government should do I think and have a better legislature. We need some kind of legislation where they protect the grower and when he ships the vegetables that he should be compensated for _____. (??). You ship a cow

from here to Kansas City, and they don't pay for it, they take him to court. There's just some way they have to pay you first. And it ought to be that way on the vegetables. And then be in a train state with Santa Fe giving so much land to New Mexico, they ought to be required to haul our produce in refrigerated cars. They are in Arizona and California. It's hard to compete with that. But with the cars they have gigantic semi-trailers and they back them up to your shed. You fill them up. They take them put them on piggy-back on their train. They're fully guaranteed. If anything goes wrong, you're compensated. Whereas a trucker pulls in here, that's his business. He can't pay for the load if he loses it. So there's a lot of little things that need working out to get agriculture back on the track, but I don't know what's going to happen because there's not enough of them, you know, enough votes to scare the congressional people.

BM: I guess time will tell, huh?

JT: Fuel is what's killing us, too. Where you had back in the bracero days, you had cheap fuel. We put in a diesel well out here in the [19]50s, and that thing burns three gallons of gas, diesel an hour, which about thirty-three cents an hour. Today we pay a dollar eighty about per delivered diesel. They charge more to bring it to the farm than they do at the pump downtown. It used to be the reverse when I went to college. Well, I had a tank brought up and put my gas in and I saved a lot of money doing that. Today you can't do it. Like you go into to Sam's to buy something, dog food, it's so much a case. You go over to Walt-Mart and it's cheaper in individual cans. And you say why? Oh that's convenience. That's no convenience to pay more money. There's some things you can do alright in there.

BM: You have to watch it, huh?

JT: Yeah. You need to know what it's all about with the prices and competition. But the dog food at Walt-Mart, well it's the cheapest there is in the name brands.

BM: Now Mr. Tomlin I appreciate your time and I'm going to turn this off now.

END OF THE INTERVIEW