

Success in Organizing, Failure in Collective Bargaining: The Case of Tomato Workers in Northwest Ohio, 1967-69

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ABSTRACT

Northwest Ohio is one of several areas in the Great Lakes region specializing in a variety of cash crops that historically require great influxes of migratory labor for brief periods of cultivation and harvesting. Bad economic conditions of migrant tomato pickers in northwest Ohio gave rise to their unionization between 1967-69. Baldemar Velasquez and the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) made strong efforts at organizing them and succeeded in negotiating 21 contracts in 1968 and an additional 11 contracts in 1969. After the emergence of FLOC in 1967, the union had to press the case for free access to migrant camps, and had to go on strike before winning recognition and entering negotiations. Paradoxically, the successful organizing efforts produced collective bargaining agreements that the union eventually abandoned because they failed to remedy the low wages, irregular employment, and adverse working and living conditions. The theoretical frames of reference developed by Taylor and Craypo are used to explain and understand the union's organizing success and failed collective bargaining. The paper documents the major events surrounding the unionizing activities and also interprets this paradoxical outcome in farm labor relations.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Rosenbaum has a Ph.D. in Economics and is a Post-Doctoral Fellow with the Julian Samora Research Institute. His ongoing research while at the Institute is in Latino economic issues, including the unionization and collective bargaining of Latino workers; the economics of Latino businesses; and the international commuter worker phenomenon as an economic feature of the U.S. border economy.