

Success in Organizing, Failure in Collective Bargaining: The Case of Pickle Workers in Wisconsin, 1967-68

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ABSTRACT

Wisconsin is one of several states 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, harvesting, and processing. Successful organizing of migrant pickle workers by Jesus Salas in 1967 led to the certification of his union, Obreros Unidos (United Workers), as the workers' exclusive bargaining representative. Despite the successful organizing efforts, however, the result of the collective bargaining efforts was the elimination of bargaining unit employee jobs by mechanical harvesting before even signing the contract. The theoretical frame of reference developed by Craypo is used to explain the union's organizing success and failed collective bargaining. The model initially shows the established sources of the union's bargaining strength, but because of the changing bargaining environment, they were not maintained long enough to successfully negotiate a single contract. The shirking of farmworker collective bargaining occurred through changes in the company's organizational structure, technology, and the policy of the state's legal apparatus. All combined to erode the union's bargaining power and caused the union's eventual demise. The analysis also shows that agricultural production via contract farming is a significant determinant of migrant field labor collective bargaining structures and outcomes.