

**Mexican Enclaves in the U.S. Northeast:
Immigrant and Migrant Mushroom
Workers in Southern Chester County,
Pennsylvania**

*by Victor Q. Garcia, Ph.D.
Indiana University of Pennsylvania*

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Mexican Enclaves in the U.S. Northeast: Immigrant and Migrant Mushroom Workers in Southern Chester County, Pennsylvania

Introduction

Mexican farm workers are not limiting themselves to farm areas in the U.S. Southwest. In fact, as Gamboa (1990), Garcia (1996), and Nodin Valdes (1991) have found in their research, this has never been the case. Today, as before, Mexican laborers continue to venture into communities and work in agricultural industries found throughout the country, including the U.S. Northeast. In New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, for example, vegetable, fruit, and horticultural producers are hiring Mexican laborers in unprecedented numbers. In some of these industries, like the mushroom industry of Pennsylvania, which produces nearly half of the country's crop, Mexicans make up the majority of the work force.

The relatively new Mexican enclaves in Southern Chester County, Pennsylvania, a major mushroom region of the country, will be examined in this research paper.¹ A Mexican enclave is defined as a growing concentration of Mexican-origin residents, both foreign and U.S.-born, who reside permanently in the boroughs and townships of the region. In these communities, they are changing the demographic characteristics of neighborhoods, from aging and Anglo to young and Mexican. At the same time, the Mexican populace is altering the culture, by introducing the Spanish language, another way of life, and traditional Mexican practices, like *tandas* (rotating credit associations) and *compadrazgo* (fictive kin) ties.

The focus of this paper will be on two expanding enclaves, one in Kennett Square and the other in nearby Toughkenamon. Mexican immigration, residential concentration, and housing and living conditions will be presented in the two cases. A brief demographic and socioeconomic profile of the immigrant and migrant populations will also be included. Additionally, the arrival of the Mexicans in these communities and others will be contextualized within other population changes in Southern Chester County, namely the settlement of White professionals immigrating from surrounding metropolitan areas and the exodus of Blacks. The reasons behind the growth of the Mexican enclaves will also be covered in the paper. It will be argued that the mushroom industry and the Special Agricultural Workers (SAW) Program together are responsible for the on going Mexican enclave process.

The Latino Population in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania has the second largest Latino population in the northeast (the State of New York has the greatest number of Latinos).² In 1990, Pennsylvanian Latinos numbered 232,000 persons; 2% of the state's 11.9 million inhabitants. Although Latinos comprise 2% of the state's population, they are growing rapidly. From 1980 to 1990, the number of Latino residents grew by 50.9%; whereas Pennsylvania's overall population increased by only 1% (Falcon, 1993). Puerto Ricans made up the majority of the Latinos, with the Mexicans the second largest constituency group. Respectively, they account for 65% and 10.2% of the Latinos.

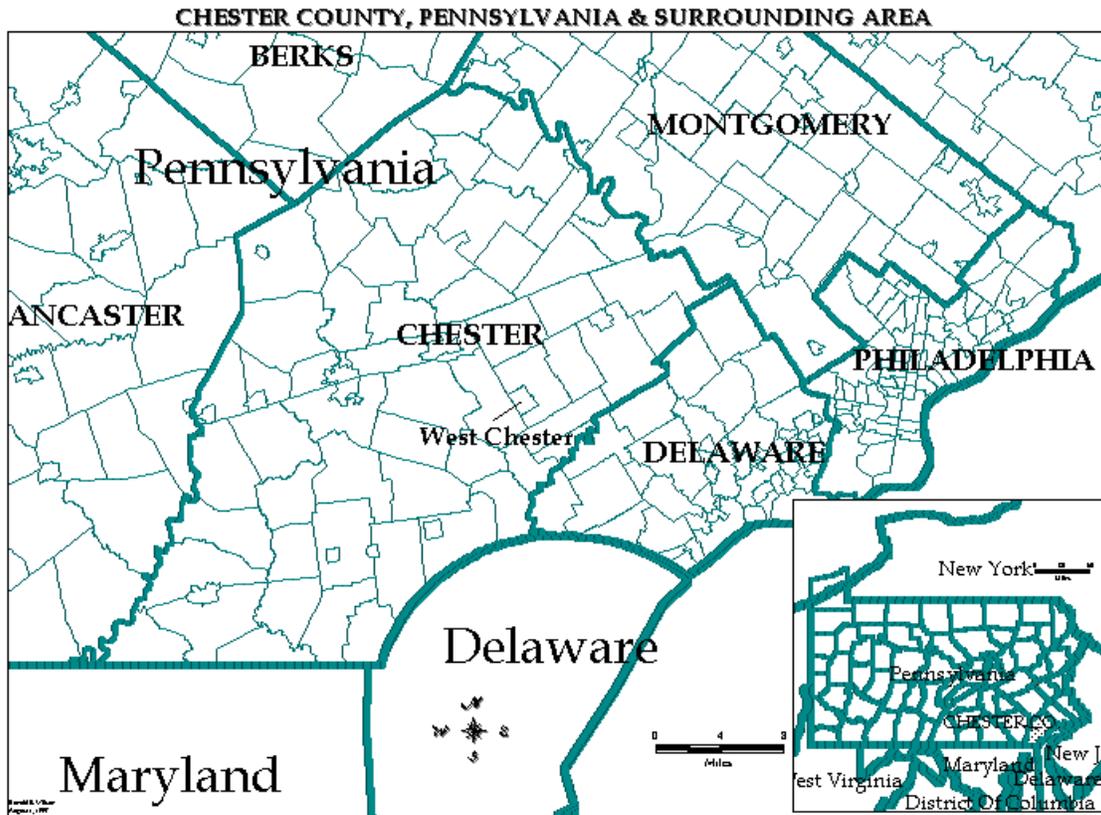
Contrary to popular belief, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans are not newcomers to Pennsylvania. Since the 1800's, thousands of Caribbean immigrants have settled in the state. In particular, Puerto Ricans immigrated en masse in the 1930's and the 1940's to work in agriculture and the steel mills of eastern and southeastern Pennsylvania. In addition, Mexicans were induced to work in these same industries as early as the 1920's (Taylor, 1973). At first, only single men were recruited by company-sponsored *enganchadores*, or labor recruiters, and transported to industrial cities, such as Allentown and Bethlehem. Later on, Mexican workers, together with their families, migrated and immigrated to these locales and others on their own (Taylor, 1973). However, unlike the Puerto Ricans and other Caribbean-origin Latinos, these early sojourners did not establish strong migration and immigration networks in the area. They would not do so until the 1980's.

Today, the majority of the Puerto Ricans live in cities situated on the eastern side of the state, mainly in Allentown, Lancaster, Reading, and Philadelphia (Falcon, 1993). Mexicans also live and work in these cities, but unlike the Puerto Ricans, they are primarily located in the townships and boroughs outside of these and other metropolitan areas (Garcia, 1993). They are concentrated in nine contiguous counties in southeastern Pennsylvania. The nine counties are York, Lancaster, Berks, Lehigh, Northampton, Bucks, Montgomery, Delaware, and Chester. In these counties, labor-intensive crops, such as vegetables, fruits, and mushrooms are harvested by Mexican farm workers. They also cut wine grapes in Erie County, located in northeastern Pennsylvania, and pick apples in historic Bedford County, situated in the southern central region of the state.

Southern Chester County

The County of Chester has one of the largest concentrations of Latinos outside of any major metropolitan area in Pennsylvania. Out of 376,396 inhabitants, 8,030, or a little over 2%, are “Hispanics” (Chester County, 1992). The physical area, 762 square miles, is divided into 73 municipalities and contains 57 townships, 15 boroughs, and one city (Chester County, 1992). The county is located in the southeastern tier of the state, and is bordered on the northwest by Berks County, on the east by Montgomery and Delaware counties, on the south by the states of Maryland and Delaware, and on the west by Lancaster County (see Map 1).

Location wise, Southern Chester County covers about the lower one-third of Chester County. It is comprised of 4 school districts — Avon Grove, Kennett, Oxford, and Unionville-Chadds Ford — which encompass 20 municipalities.³ Small quaint townships and boroughs, situated along the old Baltimore Pike Road, known locally as Old Route One, minutes away from surrounding metropolitan areas, set the region apart from the remainder of the county. Interspersed around these communities are farms, mushroom plants, migrant labor camps, and horse ranches. In the past, farming and horticultural production have been the major industries in this semi-rural region; however, today, service sector industries, such as light assembly and retail stores, are equally as important to the



Nearly half of the enumerated Latinos in the county, or 3,577 of them, live in a region known as Southern Chester County. The majority, according to 1990 census figures, are Puerto Ricans. However, if the hundreds of the missed Mexican migrants who live in labor camps were to be included in the censuses they would be the largest Latino group by far. Overall, 58,762 residents, or 15.6% of Chester County’s total population, reside in this southern region (Chester County, 1992). In terms of ethnicity, the population is comprised of Italian immigrants, Italian Americans, Whites, Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and now Mexicans who, at one time or another, have settled in this region since the turn of the century. They live in four boroughs and 19 townships, all with under 6,000 inhabitants.

local economy. Regardless of the inroads made by the service sector, mushroom growing remains a major industry in terms of employment and revenues.

Mexican Enclaves

Exactly when the Mexicans began to settle down in Southern Chester County is not known. However, there is a general agreement among the old-timers that as early as the 1960’s, Mexican migrants were already working in the local mushroom industry. These early sojourners were solo men who left their families behind in Mexico. There is evidence that in the 1970’s some of these early migrants, mainly those with permanent resident status,

started to settle with their wives and children. First, they resided in housing provided by their mushroom employers and later, in the boroughs and townships, especially in Kennett Square and Toughkenamon. As they moved into the communities, they began to show up in the censuses.

In all, 2,454 Mexicans were enumerated in all of Chester County in the last decennial census. Nearly two-thirds of them, 1,728 laborers over the age of 16, were employed in agriculture, mainly in the mushroom industry (U.S. Census Bureau, 1992). These census figures, however, do not include all of the Mexican residents in the county as a whole. In fact, it is safe to assume that the numbers do not even come close to an approximation of this group in Southern Chester County alone. This discrepancy is due, on the one hand, to the traditional undercount of Mexicans in official censuses and, on the other hand, to the presence of residents who arrived after the 1990 Census.⁴

Despite the shortcomings of the census data, they do indicate a growing Mexican presence in nearly all of the boroughs and townships in Southern Chester County. However, as enumeration figures show, the largest concentrations are in Kennett Square and Toughkenamon, located a little over a mile apart from each other, along the old Baltimore Pike Road.

Kennett Square

In the 1990 census enumeration, Kennett Square, the largest borough in Southern Chester County, had a population of 5,218 inhabitants concentrated in a physical area of about 1.1 square miles (Chester County, 1992). It sits on the crossroads of Old Route One (in an east-

west direction) and Route 82 (in a south-north direction). Located in the heartland of mushroom country, Kennett Square is the self-proclaimed mushroom capital of the world. Philips Mushroom Museum, the American Mushroom Industry (the industry's largest trade association), and the largest mushroom "houses," or production plants, are located in the vicinity. Additionally, at any given time, at least a couple of hundred mushroom harvesters live in the community.

The Mexican population is the fastest growing Latino ethnic group in the borough. In absolute numbers, as shown in Table 1, the non-Hispanic White population in Kennett Square only increased from 3,847 to 3,918 peo-

TABLE 1. ETHNIC POPULATION SIZE IN 1980 AND 1990
Toughkenamon, Pennsylvania

YEAR	BLACKS	HISPANICS	NON-HISPANIC WHITES	OTHER	TOTAL POPULATION
1980	93/08.38%	207/18.63%	811/72.99%	—	1,111/100%
1990	43/03.38%	500/39.28%	726/57.03%	4/.31%	1,273/100%

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Census, *General Population Characteristics - Pennsylvania*, Washington, D.C., 1982; *General Population Characteristics - Pennsylvania*, Washington, D.C., 1992.

ple, but in relative terms, it decreased from 81.6% to 75.08% of the total population. Meanwhile, as indicated in Table 2, the Mexican population rose from 24 to 374 people during the same period, an increase of 1,450%. These Mexican residents are not clustered in any one given area, but are primarily scattered south of State Street wherever affordable housing is found. Yet, in places where they have settled, they have created their

TABLE 2. HISPANIC POPULATION SIZE IN 1980 AND 1990
Toughkenamon, Pennsylvania

YEAR	MEXICAN ORIGIN	PUERTO RICAN	CUBAN	OTHER	TOTAL HISPANIC POPULATION
1980	88/42.5%	112/54.1%	—	7/03.4%	207/100%
1990	354/70.8%	136/27.2%	3/.6%	7/1.4%	500/100%

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Census, *General Population Characteristics - Pennsylvania*, Washington, D.C., 1982; *General Population Characteristics - Pennsylvania*, Washington, D.C. 1992.

own communities. For the most part, they stay away from the small “downtown” area which runs from Willow Street to Center Street, along State Street. The only time the newcomers are seen there in large numbers is during business hours, when they are running errands. On pay days, Mexican migrants from surrounding labor camps also venture into the area to cash their paychecks in local banks and to buy cashier checks at the local post office and send them to Mexico.

Kennett Square, however, is not a struggling farm or farm worker town, similar to many found in California and other parts of the country. It is a very affluent community, comprised of a large number of professionals, middle class residents, and retirees. Kennett, as the locals call it, is a major commerce center in the area, where local people do their banking, pay their utility bills, and shop. It is also the headquarters of the Kennett School District, which services the surrounding municipalities, and houses the local high school. Nearby, immediately outside of Kennett, world renowned Longwood Gardens attracts thousands of visitors on an annual basis, and turns the community into a tourist destination in the spring, summer, and early fall. Many of the visitors stay and dine at the Longwood Inn and in surrounding bed and breakfast establishments. They can be seen browsing along State Street.

Toughkenamon

Located a little over one mile west of Kennett Square on Old Route One is the unincorporated community of Toughkenamon. It is among the smallest communities in Southern Chester County in terms of area and population size. According to the last decennial census, it had a population of 1,273 inhabitants living in a physical area that covers a little under one square mile. If Kennett Square is the self-proclaimed mushroom capital of the world,

TABLE 3. ETHNIC POPULATION SIZE IN 1980 AND 1990
Kennett Square, Pennsylvania

YEAR	BLACKS	HISPANICS	NON-HISPANIC	OTHER	TOTAL POPULATION
1980	632/13.4%	234/5.0%	3,847/81.6%	—	4,715/100%
1990	600/11.4%	662/12.6%	3,918/75.08%	38/.92%	5,218/100%

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Census, *General Population Characteristics - Pennsylvania*, Washington, D.C., 1982; *General Population Characteristics - Pennsylvania*, Washington, D.C. 1992.

Toughkenamon is the largest de facto mushroom worker “dormitory” in the region.

Like in Kennett Square, the Mexican population is the fastest growing ethnic group in Toughkenamon. As shown in Table 3, the non-Hispanic White population decreased from 811 (72.99% of the total) to 726 people (57.03% of the total) from 1980 to 1990; and concurrently, as indicated in Table 4, the Mexican population increased from 88 to 354 inhabitants, an increase of 300%. They mainly reside in the houses and the few apartment buildings situated along Church Street, Main Street, and Center Street, all of which are near a number of mushroom production houses. The visible concentration of this populace in a centralized area gives the community a strong Mexican presence.

TABLE 4. HISPANIC POPULATION SIZE IN 1980 AND 1990
Kennett Square, Pennsylvania

YEAR	MEXICAN ORIGIN	PUERTO RICAN	CUBAN	OTHER	TOTAL HISPANIC POPULATION
1980	24/10.3%	192/82%	7/3%	11/4.7%	234/100%
1990	374/56.4%	238/36%	—	50/7.6%	662/100%

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Census, *General Population Characteristics - Pennsylvania*, Washington, D.C., 1982; *General Population Characteristics - Pennsylvania*, Washington, D.C. 1992.

Toughkenamon is predominantly a bedroom community for farm workers and their families. Unlike Kennett Square, it does not have a large well to do population. Increasingly, as Mexican immigrants settle down, the community is becoming working-class in character. Additionally, it does not have a commerce center, only a handful of small businesses scattered along the old Baltimore Pike Road. In fact, residents in Toughkenamon do their banking and shop in near by Kennett Square, which is closer than the other boroughs in the area.

Additionally, like in Kennett Square, the Mexican newcomers in Toughkenamon have created a sense of community. People of similar backgrounds and from the same region back home reside in proximity to each other. They recognize themselves as *paisanos*, fellow countrymen, from a region back home and identify themselves as members of a new community in Southern Chester County. Proximity to each other also increases possibilities for mutual assistance. For example, families look after each other, care for each other's children, share resources, and provide each other with job leads and other types of information.

Other Boroughs and Townships

Other communities, such as West Grove, Avondale, and Oxford, which were devoid of Mexican families until recently, now house them. They are not always visible to the public, but their growing presence is evident. For example, Mexican women can be seen shopping in local grocery stores, and Mexican children sit in the classrooms of the schools. Further evidence are the Mexican delicatessens, video and tape shops specializing in Mexican movies and music, and tortilla factories that have opened up for business along the roads leading to and from these Mexican enclaves in the making.

As mentioned earlier, official censuses do not capture the rapid growth of the Mexican population in the communities of Southern Chester County since the 1990's. Alternative data sources, such as school enrollments of Mexican children, are better indicators for this purpose, given that an increase in their numbers is associated with the settlement of families. After all, school age children seldom migrate or immigrate without their parents and siblings. They do so as part of a family unit.

Figures from the Pennsylvania Migrant Education Program in Chester County are a good source for assessing the enrollment of new Mexican students.⁵ The program has been highly successful in identifying new Mexican children in the schools and in recruiting those who are eligible. When new students, whose parents are farm workers, enroll in local schools, they are brought to the attention of recruiters who determine whether or not the students qualify for the program. Basically, eligibility for the program is as follows:

Children whose parents/guardians work or have worked in seasonal or temporary agricultural employment and have moved across school district or state boundaries within the last three years. In Pennsylvania, agricultural employment includes: dairy farming, tomato, mushroom, vegetable and fruit harvesting; poultry, beef and food processing; and lumbering (Pennsylvania Migrant Education Program, 1997).

TABLE 5. HISPANIC ENROLLMENT IN MIGRANT EDUCATION PROGRAM, CHESTER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA 1992-1997

YEAR	MEXICAN		PUERTO RICAN		OTHER*		TOTAL	
	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT
1991-92	670	75%	179	20%	47	5%	896	100%
1992-93	824	81%	150	15%	43	4%	1017	100%
1993-94	1018	88%	117	10%	28	2%	1163	100%
1994-95	939	94%	41	4%	6	2%	997	100%
1995-96	1087	92%	70	6%	15	2%	1172	100%
1996-97	1218	93%	56	4%	30	3%	1304	100%

Sources: Jerry Bennett, Personal Communication, Pennsylvania Migrant Education Program. 1997 Brochure on Migrant Education Program, Chester County Intermediate Unit, Exton, Pennsylvania.

*In any given year, the "Other" category includes Anglos, Asians, African-Americans, and Dominicans.

Eligible children remain in the program for three years, and afterwards, the students are enrolled in English as a Second Language classes (Maria Truce, Personal Communication, June, 1997). Therefore, the enrollment figures reflect only new students from farm worker backgrounds. Others, those who completed the program, do not show up in these data.

The majority of the students in the Migrant Education Program of Chester County attend schools in the Avon Grove and the Kennett Consolidated school districts. At any given time, over 75% of the students are from these two districts. Since the 1990's, the enrollment of Mexican students has gradually increased in the program. In 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, and 1997, as Table 5 demonstrates, the numbers enrolled were respectively 670, 824, 1018, 939, 1087, and 1218 students. They accounted for the majority of the students in the program; respectively, they made up 75%, 81%, 88%, 94%, 92%, and 93% of the students. Easily, over three-fourths of them are in grades kindergarten through high school, and the remainder in Head Start and Preschool.

The Mexican Population in the Enclaves

By far, the Mexican population in Southern Chester County consists of new arrivals – immigrants and migrants. As the census reveals, however, there are significant numbers who were born in the United States. Indeed, out of 2,454 enumerated Mexicans, 818 were born in the United States and the remainder abroad (U.S. Census Bureau, 1992). Over half of them, 1,314, were not U.S. citizens (U.S. Census Bureau, 1992). In terms of “persons 5 years and over,” which numbered 2,203 inhabitants, 884 of them resided in the same home in 1985, 899 in a different house in the United States (of whom 546 lived in the same county and 353 in a different one), and 420 of them resided abroad (U.S. Census Bureau, 1992). In terms of English language ability, another indicator of how long they have been in the country, out of 2,203 persons 5 years or over, 1,420 claimed that they did not speak “English well” (U.S. Census Bureau, 1992).

Of the foreign-born population, it is difficult to determine with any degree of accuracy the number of immigrants and migrants. In the past, prior to the Special Agricultural Workers (SAW) Program in the 1980's, to be discussed in greater detail later in this paper, the majority were migrants.⁶ However, there is strong evidence that immigrants have gained ground over the last decade or so. In fact, it is highly possible that most of the 2,454 Mexicans captured in the 1990 census were long-term

residents or immigrants, given that many of the migrants, especially those who reside in labor camps, were missed in the official census enumeration. It is also highly possible that not all of the members of the long-term and immigrant population in the boroughs and townships were counted, especially those who were illegal, or undocumented, workers.

Immigrants. Mexican immigrants are individuals and families that have relocated to Southern Chester County on a permanent basis. They have left their hometowns in Mexico with their spouses and children with the intent of staying for good in Pennsylvania.

Immigrants primarily differ from migrants in that they find themselves with their families, not alone, like the migrants. This distinction between the two groups adds other dimensions to the differences between migrants and immigrants. One is that the ratio of men to women is not as high as in the migrant population. Another difference is that the immigrant population is younger than the migrants. While the adult immigrants are in their twenties, thirties, and forties, immigrant children are infants or of grammar school age. Since there are more immigrant children than immigrant adults, the immigrant population as a whole is younger than the migrants.

There are some solo men and women in the immigrant population. In many of the cases, however, they are only single until they manage to bring their families to this country.

All of the immigrants, except for some of the spouses and all of the children, were migrants before they settled down in Southern Chester County. As such, their migration history and patterns are similar to those of their migrant counterparts. They, too, ventured to and worked in California, Texas, and Illinois before settling in the boroughs and townships. Although they are immigrants, they continue to visit their kin in Mexico periodically, but because of the high cost involved, not as often as they wish.

In the immigrant households, the men harvest mushrooms for a living. Some of them have tried their luck in other jobs but, like the migrants, returned because employment elsewhere is not as gainful as in the mushroom industry. Women household members work in the mushroom industry, not as harvesters, but as packers. They also work in the service sector, as house cleaners, babysitters, cashiers, food handlers, and as general laborers in retail businesses. They earn anywhere from \$4.35 to \$4.50 an hour, and from \$250 to \$350 a week in these jobs. However, service work is temporary and, as such, not available

year-round. Many of the employers do not employ workers for more than nine months out of the year in order to keep from providing benefits. In addition, the minimum hourly wage, \$4.25, is the beginning rate in nearly all of the positions. Moreover, these jobs are not always available to immigrant Mexican workers. The local service industry generates new jobs every year, but laborers with a high school diploma and English proficiency out compete foreign workers for the limited job openings.

The majority of the immigrants are from the Mexican state of Guanajuato. They are mainly from small ranches in the municipios of Moroleon, Uriangato, and Yuriria. For example, they are from Las Penas, La Barranca, La Loma, and La Ordena in Moroleon; from Monte de Juarez, La Cienega Prieta, Tierra Blanca, San Vicente, and San Isidro in Yuriria; and from El Derramadero, El Cuervo, La Lobera, El Aguacate, and La Lagunilla in Uriangato. Other migrants are from the states of Mexico, Puebla, Michoacan, Guerrero, Morelos, and Jalisco. The migrants from the State of Mexico are called *Tolucas* [after the capital of the state], but the majority are from the municipios of Almoloya de Alquisiras, Texcaltitlan, and Tixca in the same state.

Most of the immigrants live in tradition housing — single family houses and multi-family units (apartments and duplexes) — found in the boroughs and townships. Map 2 contains clusters of some of the immigrant families that have at least one income earner working in the mushroom industry. As the map indicates, the greatest concentrations are found in and around the local communities. Families living away from the boroughs and townships reside in housing provided by their employer.

Migrants also live among the immigrants. They either live with immigrant kin or share an apartment with other migrant workers. Since 1986, a growing number of migrants have been moving into the townships and boroughs. In that year, a class action suit forced the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources to inspect all farm labor housing in the state on an annual basis. Some growers opted to close their housing unit rather than open them to state scrutiny. The displaced migrants had no choice but to join their immigrant counterparts in local communities, where up to 15 or more workers moved into and shared one and two bedroom apartments.

In the boroughs and townships, many of the immigrants and migrants reside in dilapidated and, in many cases, unsafe single-family houses and apartment units. For example, electrical wiring is in need of replacement or extensive repairs; sewage and drain backups are frequent; and roach and rodent infestations are rampant. Addition-

ally, overcrowding is a major problem. Immigrant families, living in houses and apartment units, share their homes with arrimados (temporary household members), who are usually migrant kinsmen, such as parents, siblings, uncles or aunts, cousins, or compadres or comadres (fictive kin/co-parents). In many cases, up to 15 people share a 2-bedroom apartment, the men in one room, and women and children in another. Migrants reside in similar overcrowded conditions. It is not unusual to have up to 15 of them living in a single housing unit.

The overcrowded living conditions are not due to a housing shortage in the boroughs and townships. The “For Sale” signs on many lawns are evidence of this fact. However, there is a dearth of single and multi-family dwellings that low-income people can afford to buy and rent. Real estate is no longer affordable as it was in the past. In 1980, the median home price was \$66,000, while 10 years later it increased to \$149,000, over a 100% increase (Chester County, 1992). Today, mortgages run from \$1,000 to \$4,500 a month for a 1- or 2-bedroom house, more money than a mushroom worker earns in a month. Rents have also risen during this time: the median rent increased from \$284 in 1980 to \$496 in 1990. Add utilities to rents, and housing expenses increase from \$650 to \$850 (Chester County, 1992).

The shortage of affordable housing is further aggravated by the concentration of immigrants in low-paying jobs in the mushroom and service industries. In these industries, the average annual income of the day laborers is \$12,500 with no benefits, except for the state unemployment and disability assistance. This income level places them at a true disadvantage in a community, such as Kennett Square, where the annual average family income is over three times as much, up to \$40,000 (Chester County, 1992).

Regardless of their deplorable living conditions, there is a strong sense of community among the Mexican residents in these housing units. Many of them have lived in close proximity to each other for a number of years, and kinship ties among others contribute to this strong bond. Neighbors know each other by name and socially interact on a regular basis. The adults visit one another, and the children frolic in and around the units together. Neighbors also look after each other. They watch over each other’s homes during absences; and they keep an eye on each other’s children, at times baby-sitting for each other. In addition, neighbors genuinely care for one another. They give each other gifts — usually food — and loans; run errands; and, when illness strikes, they comfort and care for the sick.

Migrants. Migrants are individuals who leave their homes in Mexico to work in Southern Chester County for an undetermined amount of time, anywhere from a few months to five years. The stay is temporary; that is, the workers eventually return to their homes and families in Mexico after earning a targeted amount of money.

Mexican migrants are predominantly males. Women are also found in the migrant population, but their numbers are small in comparison. They do not migrate alone, but accompany male kin, usually a husband, brother, father, or cousin, or join kin already in the region. Both men and women are in the same age groups; they are in their twenties, thirties, and forties, in the prime of their productive lives. Adult migrant women are older than their immigrant counterparts.

Migrant men mainly work in the mushroom industry, as harvesters (more will be said about mushroom work in the following sections of this paper), and the women in this group are employed in the mushroom industry, as packers, and in the same service sector jobs as the immigrant women. Additionally, both the men and women are also from the same communities in Mexico as their immigrant counterparts.

Most of the male migrants reside in grower-provided housing. Female migrants do not live there. The women reside with immigrant kin in the boroughs and townships. The men live in add-ons, cottages, and trailers, all of them situated on or near mushroom farms. Add-ons are cement brick structures built onto the side wall of an existing mushroom house, or a “double,” as they are called in the industry. These living quarters have windows and front and back entrances. From the outside, they do not resemble housing at all; they look more like an office complex or storage facility.

Inside, the add-on is divided into two basic areas: a common area, which serves as a day room, kitchen, and dinette, and a dormitory area, where the workers sleep and keep their personal belongings. In the common area, the workers watch television, cook and eat their meals, and socialize. When the weather permits, they carry out many of these activities outside. The dormitory area is divided into three or four rooms, each room housing up to four harvesters, all of them men: and it contains the showers and toilets.

Some growers house their migratory workers in cottages on their property. These units are small homes; they are comprised of a kitchen-dinette area and bedrooms. Like in the add-ons, the kitchen-dinette area is also a day room, where workers watch television and socialize. Depending on the size of the cottage, up to 15 workers are housed in the unit. If harvesters occupy the cottages, the residents are only men. In some cases, growers also house their plant managers, truck drivers, and other workers, together with their families, in these units. Trailers and mobile homes, located close to the mushroom houses, are also used to house migratory workers. For the most part, however, they are occupied by non-harvesters and their families.

In these housing units, migrants live in a dormitory living arrangement. Although they live together, they do not form a single household. Each one manages his own earnings and makes his own expenditures. In addition, each one pays rent and his share of the food costs. By co-residing, they share shelter, furnishings, and other amenities; and by commiserating, they prepare and consume their meals as a group.

The housing types described above, alone or grouped, are often referred to as *campos*, or labor camps, by the migrants. As Map 3 shows, they are primarily located outside of the boroughs and township. Those within the local communities are clusters of migrants sharing a house, duplex, or apartment unit.

The camps are found in all the municipalities of Southern Chester County, except in Upper Oxford, Birmingham, and London Britain. The majority of the labor camps are found in the municipalities of New Garden and Kennett Square. In the former, there are 44 camps, and in the latter, there are 18 camps. The municipality of London Grove follows in third place with 17 labor camps. Penn has eight labor camps; Lower Oxford, six camps; East Nottingham, four; and Upper Oxford, three, West Marlboro, three; East Marlboro, three; Elk, two; and the remainder of municipalities have only one camp each.

Other Ethnic and Population Changes in Southern Chester County

Mexicans did not immigrate into static boroughs and townships; that is, communities with populations that were not undergoing any other changes in size and composition except for those brought about by the influx of Mexicans. Whites, Blacks, and Puerto Ricans were transforming the populations, as well.

Whites

At about the same time that the Mexican mushroom harvesters and their families were immigrating into Southern Chester County another group was quietly settling in the area. Since the 1960's, White professionals from the Philadelphia and the Wilmington areas, such as doctors, lawyers, and engineers, have been gradually turning the boroughs and townships into bedroom communities. Many of these upscale economic "refugees" were escaping the spiraling costs of housing, high real estate taxes, schools in crises, and crime that were rampant in the cities and overflowing into the suburbs. As many of them were fond of saying about Southern Chester County: "The area is a great place to raise a family." In their new "quaint" towns, they joined Quakers, Italian immigrants, and others, many of them successful members of their communities. These newcomers purchased homes and sent their children to local schools. However, they continued to work and play in the surrounding cities. They commute to their offices on the weekdays, and go to opera, theater, and dinner on the weekends.

This shift in the population from nearby metropolitan areas to Southern Chester County shows up in official census figures. From 1980 to 1990, for example, the City of Philadelphia lost 102,633 inhabitants, or 6.1% of its population (U.S. Census Bureau 1982; 1992). In the second largest city in the area, Wilmington City in Delaware, the population increased by only 1,334 people, or a little over 1%, during the same time period (U.S. Census Bureau 1982; 1992). Meanwhile, Chester County, as a whole, increased by 59,736 residents, or 18.9% (Chester County, 1992). Most of the growth occurred in the municipalities of Southern Chester County. For example, East Nottingham, Elk, Franklin, Newlin, and New London respectively increased by 23.5%, 50.5%, 44.7%, 50.6%, and 107.4% (Chester County, 1992). Some of the municipalities in the northern portion of Chester County experienced a loss in population. For example, the population in South Coatesville and Thornbury respectively dipped by 24.5% and 14.5% (Chester County, 1992).

Puerto Ricans

Puerto Rican immigration into Southern Chester County was at an ebb in 1980's, especially when compared to the growth of the Mexican population. Nonetheless, their numbers increased in the townships and boroughs. For example, in Kennett Square, Oxford, Toughkenamon, and West Grove, the Puerto Rican population respectively grew from 192 to 232, 151 to 190, 112 to 238, 22 to 38 inhabitants, or by 23%, 25%, 112%, and 72% (U.S. Census Bureau 1982; 1992).

The Puerto Ricans were the first Latino settlers in the region. They were recruited and hired by mushroom growers during World War II, and remained the majority in the work force of the industry until the 1970's. In that decade, Puerto Rican mushroom harvesters began to organize themselves and to demand higher wages, overtime compensation, and improvements in their working conditions. Their organizing efforts were met with strong resistance from the growers, who instead of meeting their demands, systematically dismissed them and hired Mexican migrants in their place.

Although U.S. citizens by birth, since their arrival to Southern Chester County, the Puerto Ricans have not been well received by long standing members of the community. They are seen as "foreigners", culturally different, and unwilling to integrate themselves into the community.

The *Boriquas*, as the Puerto Ricans call themselves, have responded to the animosity directed to them in different ways. Some of them moved to surrounding cities, where they could easily blend in with the existing large Puerto Rican population; or if originally from the island, they returned to Puerto Rico. Others assimilated into White neighborhoods in the boroughs and townships and became exemplary citizens, according to the norms of the local populace. They became bilingual and bicultural and participated in civic and political affairs; sought and obtained good-paying jobs; and their children did well in school. Still others clustered in neighborhoods of their own where they were joined later by Mexican immigrants and migrants seeking affordable housing. In these residential areas, the *Boriquas* maintained their culture, practiced their traditions, and spoke Spanish, their native language.

Blacks

While the Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and the White professionals immigrated into Southern Chester County, the Blacks emigrated from the area in the 1980's. Their exodus shows up in the census figures. For example, the Black populations in Kennett Square, Oxford, Toughkenamon, and West Grove respectively decreased from 632 to 630, 12 to 6, 93 to 43, and 331 to 254 inhabitants, or by less than 1%, 50%, 53%, and 23% (U.S. Census Bureau 1982; 1992). They moved out of the area to surrounding cities, such as Coatesville, and Wilmington City and Newark, Delaware, where they could find work in the service industry and affordable housing.

During the 1930's, Blacks immigrated to Southern Chester County in large numbers. They, together with poor Whites, were recruited to work in the mushroom industry. Over time, their ranks grew as word of employment opportunities in the region reached others. In the 1940's, with the arrival of the Puerto Rican to the area, some of the Blacks began to look for work outside of the industry, mainly in the service sector, as day laborers. As the Puerto Ricans started to do the same in the 1970's, the Blacks found less work in services, and as the Mexicans entered this line of work in the 1980's, the Blacks found even less than before. With no employment in the area, they began to leave.

Ethnic Strife and Conflict

The potential always exists for ethnocentrism and racism to raise their ugly heads when a new "foreign-born" immigrant population settles in a community. Every immigrant group in Southern Chester County has encountered their share of misunderstandings and rejection. The Italian immigrants can attest to this. Initially, they, too, were not welcomed. Citizens are not the only ones to receive immigrants in this fashion; immigrants do the same. Those who arrived first and are struggling to establish a foothold in the community resent those who arrived later and are seen as competition for resources.

The relatively well to do White newcomers from surrounding metropolitan areas, discussed earlier, are not treated in this fashion. Instead, the community at large receives them with open arms and views them as "desirable" neighbors. They are U.S. citizens; speak English; adhere to similar values, ideas, and rules; and are seen as major economic contributors because of their investments in their homes and the money they pay in real estate taxes

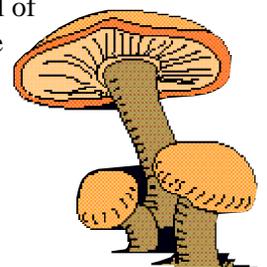
Since the Mexican newcomers are different in physical appearance, culture, and language, they stand out. Without wanting to, they attract attention to themselves. Furthermore, residentially clustered and relatively segregated from other neighborhoods and main street, they seldom interact and socialize with other ethnic groups, except for the Puerto Ricans. Relatively isolated, the Mexicans hold onto their traditions or re-tool them to fit their new reality, and as a result, are slow in adopting the values, beliefs, and norms of the dominant culture in the region.

What happens, as an immediate consequence, is that the new Mexican population not only appear different to the White majority, but they also come to be seen as out-

siders. Without direct and daily interaction with the Mexican immigrants, Whites find the differences difficult to understand, and they quickly judge the entire group on the basis of the actions of a few members. For example, when some of the Mexicans receive coverage in local newspapers because they were arrested for drinking alcohol and driving or disorderly conduct in public, the entire group are seen as deviant or as "bad people." The White population judges the newcomers only on the basis of what they hear or the little that they know; and since what they often hear is negative, they quickly come to the conclusion that they do not want anything to do with the Mexicans.

Additionally, as the immigrant population increases in size, it poses new challenges to local governments and school districts. For example, the limited affordable and low-rent housing becomes extremely scarce; and local schools find themselves unprepared to meet the educational needs of monolingual Spanish-speaking children. With no easy and quick solutions in sight, some of the local residents become frustrated and resent the growing presence of the "outsiders." They are quick to blame them for just about all the social and economic ills in the community, despite the fact that many of these problems were there long before the arrival of the new immigrants. Before long, enraged residents lend their voices to a growing outcry in our nation for halting immigration.

In 1993, this nativistic sentiment was particularly evident during and immediately after a two-month strike by Mexican workers at Kaolin Mushroom Farms, one of the largest producers in the area.⁷ For the first time since their arrival, Mexicans made their presence known through public demonstrations and a march to Harrisburg, the capital of the state. Besides addressing labor issues, such as low wages and poor working conditions, they used the strike to bring attention to their poor living situation in the townships, boroughs, and labor camps. Embarrassed by the attention and angered by the "uppity" Mexicans, local residents, especially the Whites, responded with hostility and discrimination. They publicly referred to the Mexicans as "wetbacks" or "dirty Mexicans." In local talk radio programs, callers would repeatedly state that "if they don't like here, they should go back where they came from." Some landlords, as this writer discovered while looking for housing in the area, refused to rent housing units to Mexicans, believing that all of them are dirty, unruly and incapable of maintaining a home.⁸



Given the similarities in language and culture, one would think that the Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, or *Portorosos/as* (as they are referred to by local Mexican residents), would get along. To this date, however, the two groups do not always trust nor like each other. The major contention between the two is that the Puerto Ricans accuse the Mexicans of taking their jobs in the mushroom industry. In turn, the Mexicans resent being blamed for something that they had no control over and claim that Mexicans are preferred in the industry because they know how to work hard. The Puerto Ricans, they argue, are lazy. Closely related, the Mexicans also resent the Puerto Ricans because, as U.S. citizens, they are entitled to public assistance, whereas the Mexicans are not. They have to work hard and make ends meet with the little that they have.

In the midst of this conflict, quite a few Puerto Rican and Mexican families get along and have established long lasting friendships. Some Mexican families are grateful for and acknowledge the assistance they have received from the Puerto Ricans. The Puerto Ricans informed the Mexican newcomers on how to turn the utilities in their housing units on and how to get telephone service. Bilingual Puerto Ricans translated English-language letters for them as well.

While derogatory comments are made by some of the residents, there are others who do what they can to help Mexican residents assimilate into their communities. Religious groups are at the forefront of this difficult task. For example, the Quakers welcome the newcomers to worship at their services, and provide them with clothing, food, and housing leads. They also espouse tolerance of the new group, and organize community forums to bring Mexicans and non-Mexicans together for public discussions. Pentecostals and Catholics do the same. Some mushroom growers also do what they can to welcome their Mexican workers. They help them find housing and credit in stores.

Reasons Behind the Mexican Enclave Growth in Southern Chester County

Palerm (1991) and two of his colleagues, Garcia (1992; 1995) and Krissman (1995), use the agricultural restructuring hypothesis in their work to explain the emergence and the growth of Mexican and Mexican American enclaves in major farming regions of California.⁹ It may also serve as a possible explanation for similar developments in Southern Chester County, Pennsylvania, given that production in the mushroom

industry in that state has gone through changes that resemble very much those experienced by the vegetable and fruit industry of California. Basically, the hypothesis postulates that changes in agricultural production which require more labor over a longer period of time, up to a year in the case of some crops, increase the number of workers hired in the area and, eventually, many of them settle down with their families instead of going months or, in some cases, years without seeing them. These new settlers alter the ethnic and demographic composition of local communities.

In the Santa Maria Valley, a major farm region in California, for example, Palerm (1991) and Garcia (1992) found that the acreage devoted to highly labor-intensive crops, such as lettuce, broccoli, and strawberries, which if not cultivated year-round were harvested anywhere from six to nine months out of the year, increased significantly from the 1960's to the 1990's. Additionally, hybrid seeds, seedling plantings, and other field innovations intensified the production of these crops. This increment in turn led to a rise in the number of farm laborers who would stay and work in the area for eight months, if not the entire year. Consequently, over the years, many of them would settle down in the local communities, augmenting the number of permanent Mexican residents and, in the process, changing the existing composition of many of the neighborhoods.

Palerm (1991) and Garcia (1992) also found that many Mexican enclaves in California emerged and grew as a result of government programs designed to control the flow of labor into the country. As will be pointed out in the following sections, one program, the SAW Program, was instrumental in the settlement of Mexicans in Pennsylvania.

Two programs — the Bracero Program and SAW Program — contributed to Mexican immigration into the Santa Maria Valley. For 22 years, from 1942 to 1964, thousands of Mexican workers were recruited to work in the valley through the Bracero Program.¹⁰ In the mid-1960's, after its termination, growers, fearful of losing their skilled farm labor force, encouraged and assisted their ex-bracero workers and their families to settle in the region. Later on, the SAW Program played a similar role in the 1980's and 1990's. Like their bracero predecessors, the SAW workers and their families settled down in local communities. Together, the two programs have created major Mexican enclaves in the Santa Maria Valley.

The Mushroom Industry

Starting in the mid-1960's, the mushroom industry in Chester and surrounding counties began to restructure itself to meet new challenges, such as urban sprawl, rising taxes, new government regulations, and competition from multinational corporations (Brosius, 1986). The transformation was gradual at first, but intensified in the 1980's, as it underwent a costly economic crisis brought about by fierce foreign and national competition (Smith, 1992). Inefficient producers were pushed out of business during this trying time, and the efficient ones, those who invested capital in bringing their production operations up to date with the latest technology, began to grow high yield varieties of mushrooms on a year-round basis for the fresh market. Year-round production led to a demand for mushroom harvesters who would stay and work in the region year round. Subsequently, many of the Mexican harvesters have settled down in local communities, instead of going long periods of time without seeing their wives and children.

Producers

Since 1980, the number of mushroom producers in Southern Chester County has declined significantly. However, as will be pointed out later, production has intensified over the years. It was estimated that 69 mushroom companies operated in this region in 1994. Fifty-two, or 75% of them, were based in West Grove, Avondale, Kennett Square, and Toughkenamon. The actual number is difficult to determine in any given year, given that some producers go out of business, and others start their production activities for the first time in the industry. Still other producers cease their activities under one name only to resume production under another; that is, they are the same growers but with new company names.

TABLE 6. PENNSYLVANIA MUSHROOM SALES BY TYPE AND PERCENT OF TOTAL, 1980-1995

	FRESH MARKET		PROCESSING		TOTAL#S
	VOLUME OFSALES	%	VOLUME OFSALES	%	
1980	70,049,000	33	143,660,000	67	213,709,000
1981	87,861,000	37	149,602,000	63	237,463,000
1982	120,141,000	44	152,907,000	56	273,048,000
1983	129,331,000	52	117,251,000	48	246,582,000
1984	154,675,000	55	124,979,000	45	279,654,000
1985	159,667,000	58	115,529,000	42	275,196,000
1986	156,179,000	61	99,981,000	39	256,160,000
1987	183,154,000	65	98,222,000	35	281,376,000
1988	185,109,000	65	99,674,000	35	284,783,000
1989	176,442,000	60	117,628,000	40	294,070,000
1990	192,820,000	58	139,629,000	42	332,449,000
1991	189,500,000	54	161,704,000	46	351,204,000
1992	184,520,000	52	173,750,000	48	358,270,000
1993	197,993,000	53	172,120,000	47	370,113,000
1994	184,913,000	52	169,880,000	48	354,793,000
1995	182,250,000	51	172,250,000	49	354,500,000
1996	NA				

Sources: Pennsylvania Agricultural Statistic Services, Summaries and Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Annual Reports, 1980-1996 Issues.
**1996 Figures will not be available until October 1997*

The majority of the mushroom growers are second- and third-generation Italian-Americans whose fathers and grandfathers started their own businesses after working as harvesters themselves (Harris 1990). They are predominantly small-scale producers, although as demonstrated by Kaolin Mushroom Farms, there is evidence of a trend toward larger units of production. Kaolin Mushroom Farms hires more than 500 harvesters who work in over five "mushroom houses" in Kaolin, Avondale, Landenberg, and Kennett Square. Two other producers grow mushrooms in more than one area. These larger firms are vertically integrated, with control of every phase of production and marketing, including compost preparation, growing, harvesting, packaging, sales, and distribution. They also specialize in high-value exotic varieties that bring in a substantial profit.

Production and Markets

Unlike the crops grown outdoors and subjected to the whims of nature, mushrooms are grown indoors under controlled temperature, humidity, and light conditions. They are grown inside of 2-story, cinder block "houses," or buildings, called "doubles". The standard size of each building is 8,000 square feet, and inside, air conditioners, heaters, and other apparatuses keep light, temperature, humidity, and carbon dioxide at a constant level. This artificial growing environment allows producers to grow and harvest mushrooms every month of the year.¹¹

Since 1980, as Table 6 shows, mushroom production in Pennsylvania is primarily for sale in the fresh market. From 1980 to 1989, production for this market increased from 33% to 66%; while from 1990 to 1995, it declined from 58% to 51%.¹² Prior to the early 1980's, the reverse was true; mushrooms were mainly grown for processing, especially for canning companies in the area. Starting in the 1970's, however, local mushroom processors, mainly canneries, gradually lost markets to foreign competitors, especially Asian producers (Smith, 1992).

As Table 7 reveals, anywhere from 30% to 51% of Pennsylvania's horticulture and mushroom sales were generated in Chester County. Given these figures, it is highly possible that since 1980, from 30% to 51% of the state's mushrooms have been grown in this county. Most of the local producers grow agaricus mushrooms for the fresh market; and an undetermined number are growing specialty mushrooms, such as the shitake, portobello, porcino, and oyster varieties. Agaricus mushrooms are the common button variety sold in grocery stores across the country. They account for the majority of the mushrooms grown in the nation.

TABLE 7. CASH RECEIPTS FROM SALE OF HORTICULTURE & MUSHROOM PRODUCTS IN PENNSYLVANIA & CHESTER COUNTY, 1980-1995

YEAR	CASH RECEIPTS IN PENNSYLVANIA	CASH RECEIPTS IN CHESTER COUNTY	CHESTER COUNTY AS A % OF PENN.
1980	\$278,681,000	\$132,769,000	47.64
1981	\$285,280,000	\$119,120,000	41.75
1982	\$303,346,000	\$133,221,000	43.91
1983	\$298,758,000	\$125,064,000	41.86
1984	\$452,601,000	\$183,314,000	40.00
1985	\$467,228,000	\$192,435,000	41.18
1986	\$466,641,000	\$188,432,000	40.38
1987	\$471,989,000	\$190,289,000	40.31
1988	\$491,380,000	\$157,985,000	32.15
1989	\$505,955,000	\$150,887,000	50.59
1990	\$548,316,000	\$172,665,000	51.00
1991	\$335,765,000	\$171,259,000	51.00
1992	\$561,901,000	\$172,450,000	30.60
1993	\$577,694,000	\$183,749,000	31.80
1994	\$602,018,000	\$205,938,000	34.20
1995*	NOT AVAILABLE	—	—

Sources: Pennsylvania Agricultural Statistic Services, Summaries & Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Annual Reports, 1980-1996 Issues.

•*Horticultural production consists of flowers, nursery products and sod.*

*1995 and 1996 figures will not be available until October 1997.

Moreover, although the number of producers and square footage have declined over the years, data show that mushroom production in Chester County is on the rise.¹³ Cultivated mushrooms produce more pounds of edible food per square foot of growing space than any other crop. As Table 8 shows, square footage under production has fluctuated in Pennsylvania, while pounds of harvested mushrooms have increased by over 80% from 1980 to 1995. In 1980, 2.98 pounds were harvested per square foot, 3.29 pounds in 1981, 3.62 in 1982, 3.59 in 1983, 3.76 in 1984, 4.01 in 1985, 4.25 in 1986, 4.55 in 1987, 4.71 in 1988, 4.89 in 1989, 5.12 in 1990, 5.36 in 1991, and 5.57 in 1992. The increase in pounds per square foot means that the producers are more efficient

**TABLE 8. PRODUCTION OF AGARICUS MUSHROOMS
IN PENNSYLVANIA, 1980-1995**

YEAR	SQ. FEET UNDER MUSHROOM PRODUCTION	LBS. OF HARVESTED HARVESTED MUSHROOMS	LBS. OF HARVESTED MUSHROOMS PER SQUARE FOOT
1980	72,984,000	213,709,000	2.98
1981	72,033,000	237,463,000	3.29
1982	75,360,000	273,048,000	3.62
1983	68,620,000	246,582,000	3.59
1984	74,289,000	279,654,000	3.76
1985	68,524,000	275,196,000	4.01
1986	60,210,000	256,160,000	4.25
1987	61,759,000	281,376,000	4.55
1988	60,462,000	284,783,000	4.71
1989	60,042,000	294,070,000	4.89
1990	64,909,000	332,449,000	5.12
1991	65,506,000	351,204,000	5.36
1992	62,847,000	350,270,000	5.57
1993	66,746,000	370,113,000	5.54
1994	62,081,000	354,793,000	5.71
1995	65,100,000	354,500,000	5.44
1996*	<i>NOT AVAILABLE</i>	—	—

Sources: Pennsylvania Agricultural Statistic Services, Summaries & Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Annual Reports, 1980-1996 Issues.

* 1996 figures will not be available until October 1997.

require much more care in their handling than in the past to maintain the “eye appeal” that consumers look for in their vegetables and fruits at the produce section of their local grocery store. Additionally, the harvested yields are higher than before, averaging over 5 pounds per square foot. The special care required in the harvests and the increase in yields means that more labor is needed today.

Overall, mushroom production is highly labor-intensive and, therefore, workers are employed in every phase of production. Laborers are used in the making of compost on which the mushroom spawn is placed, by combining raw materials, such as manure, corn cobs, gypsum, and hay, and letting it ferment and break down (equivalent to preparing a field). They also place the compost in “beds” made of boards (equivalent to rows in agricultural fields), located inside of the “mushroom houses,” where the compost pasteurizes under extremely high temperatures. The laborers are also employed

than before in the “spawning” (equivalent to planting in an agricultural field) and, as a result, get more flushes, or mushroom crop, per square footage.

Production and Labor

The production of mushrooms for the fresh market is highly labor-intensive, especially the harvest, which is not easily adapted to mechanization. Up until the mid-1960’s, most mushrooms in Southern Chester County, which were grown for local canneries, were “pulled” without any special consideration during the harvest (Frezzo, 1986). On average, only two pounds per square foot were harvested then (Frezzo, 1986). Today, mushrooms are cut and

in the “spawning” process, spreading mushroom spawn over the compost, where it is allowed to grow, and in the “casing” phase, covering the spawn and compost with a layer of fertilized peat moss. The covered spawn is allowed to grow further until the mushroom “buds”. The most labor-intensive process of all, the harvest, employs most of the workers, who harvest each bed up to four or five times per spawning. Mushrooms have a much shorter time table than other crops and, consequently, they must be picked within a day when they are in a condition suitable for the fresh market. In the last phase of production, “clean and fill,” the used compost is removed, and the houses are prepared for the next “fill,” the placing of compost onto the beds.

Workers harvest mushrooms every day of the year within a small window of opportunity. They must cut the mushrooms as quickly as possible and at the same time maintain quality. The harvested mushrooms must have very little dirt on them; the caps should not have knife nicks, marks, or scratches; and the “roots” should be cut off neatly, leaving clean stems. Additionally, the casing layer on the bed should have a minimum of disturbance to allow for the next flush. While harvesting, the workers should thin and prepare the flush, or the emerging mushrooms, to produce optimum sizing and yield (Fitz, 1993). They are required to meet a quota; that is, the workers must harvest a certain number of boxes per hour, usually three to five 10-pound boxes of mushrooms. The amount is determined, on the one hand, by the quality of the flush, and on the other, by the skill of the workers in the crew. If a worker consistently fails to meet the average of the day or the harvest is sloppy and of poor quality, he may be dismissed from the crew.

Although mushrooms are harvested every day and require much labor in the process, employment is not always gainful. There are weeks when the harvesters work less than 40-hour weeks. On average, work weeks range from 20 to 60 hours, and at times, they may reach as high as 80 hours. Until recently, harvesters were paid by the piece rate, by the number of boxes containing harvested mushrooms, and would earn anywhere from \$5 to \$15 (depending on the number of boxes harvested) per hour (Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry 1992), some of the experienced harvesters up to \$40 dollars per hour (Garcia & Gonzalez, 1995). Today, the hourly wage is the prevalent form of remuneration in the harvest. The current hourly wage depends on the seniority of the worker, ranging anywhere from \$4.25 to \$7.25 (Garcia & Gonzalez, 1995). Although the harvester is paid by the hour, he must meet an hourly quota, set by the crew chief, if he wants to keep his job. During optimal market conditions and mushrooms are selling at a high price, growers may return to the piece rate as an incentive to get workers to harvest more mushrooms per hour. Overall, weekly wages of the mushroom workers range from \$180 to \$400, and annual incomes range from \$8,500 to \$19,000 (Garcia & Gonzalez, 1995). Migrants who earned only \$8,500 did not work the entire year, and those who earned close to \$19,000 supplemented their regular duties with odd jobs at the company (Garcia & Gonzalez, 1995).



Labor Recruitment. Traditionally, the industry has recruited laborers from the outside because local workers were not willing to work for low wages and few or no benefits. For example, in the 1920's, Italian immigrants who were settling in the area entered the expanding industry, at first, as workers, later, as producers. Whites and Blacks from nearby communities were also hired to meet the growing labor demands of the mushroom enterprises in the 1930's (Smith, n.d.). By the 1940's, Italians made up the majority of the mushroom producers in Chester County. In the 1940's, poor Whites from Tennessee and West Virginia and Blacks from South Carolina were recruited and hired to meet the increasing labor demands of the industry (Smith, n.d.). In the 1950's, they were joined by Puerto Ricans who dominated the mushroom labor force until the late 1970's, when Mexican migrants who began working in the 1960's became the new majority.

Today, Mexicans make up about 90% of the mushroom harvesters in Chester County (Smith, n.d.). Estimates on the size of the Mexican labor force in the mushroom industry range from 2,245 to 4,000 laborers (Smith, n.d.; Druly, 1993). The latter estimate includes unemployed workers who wait for job openings. In addition, community-based service providers, like La Comunidad Hispana, estimate the number of dependents, primarily family members, to be around 2,500 individuals (Druly, 1993). Velasco Mondragon, a Mexican physician who carried out a comprehensive health survey of the Mexican migrant population in 1993 claims that 7,500 migrants work in Chester and surrounding counties, namely Lancaster, Berks, Montgomery, and Delaware (1993).

In terms of official immigration status, informal interviews with workers reveal that there is a growing number of undocumented laborers in the mushroom industry. In fact, workers claim that every mushroom company in the county hires undocumented workers. The actual number, however, is not known.

Informal interviews with harvesters from four mushroom farms indicate that the size of the enterprises may determine whether or not undocumented workers are hired. The interviews reveal that growers who own small farms, those with 50 or fewer workers, employ undocumented workers. In one mushroom firm, over half of the 30 workers did not hold proper immigration documents. However, mention must be made that some of the large outfits also hire undocumented workers. A possible explanation why small growers are prone to hire undocumented workers is that they are in direct competition with large

producers, and as such, they have the same production costs as their larger counterparts, but with fewer resources. To cut production costs and remain in business, they pay their workers less than what the larger producers offer their employees. Documented workers do not work for low wages, whereas their undocumented counterparts accept low wages in order to remain employed.

Migrants in the mushroom industry learn about jobs before they depart from Mexico and immediately go to work when they arrive.¹⁴ They are guaranteed work before they leave Mexico through what this writer has labeled the *encargo* (entrusted) system of labor recruitment. Under this system, workers plan their departures from work and arrange for their replacements. Before they leave, they contact kin or friends back home to notify them of the pending job opening and await their arrival. Their replacements are literally entrusted with the position; they promise not to abandon it or leave until the original workers return. Upon their return, the replacements return to their homeland or work in another job that they have lined up.

Some workers migrate to Southern Chester County without going through the *encargo* system of labor recruitment. The workers who do so have experience migrating to the region. Because of a pressing financial need in Mexico, they migrate on their own with the hope of finding a job opening. In many cases, these workers become *arrimados* (temporary household members) in the household of kin or friends until they find employment. If they have difficulty finding work in the area, they leave for another locale, usually in neighboring counties, like Lancaster, Berks, and Delaware.

Other Employment Opportunities In and Outside of the Industry

For the most part, mushroom harvesters do not move from one grower to another. They stay and work where they initially arrived, unless there is a dissatisfaction with employers or problems with fellow workers. Some mushroom workers are also shared among companies on a temporary basis. When one company finds itself short of labor, because of rapid crop maturation or a sudden increase in market demand, another company will assign it some of its employees. Usually, the sharing occurs within a group of mushroom producers who have standing agreements of this type of mutual assistance among them.

Mushroom laborers also work at other jobs while holding down their harvesting jobs. When production is slow, or at the end of the work day, they accept additional work from their employers, performing such tasks as shoveling snow, cleaning mushroom houses, and adding nutrient agents to the mushroom soils. Some laborers work outside of the company; they clean yards and horse stables, paint houses, and bag tortillas at the local factory outside of Toughkenamon. However, moonlighting on a regular basis is not a common practice. Odd jobs are not always available; and when they are at hand, many workers are too exhausted at the end of the day to take advantage of them.

Occasionally, some mushroom harvesters, or *hongerros*, as they call themselves, leave the mushroom industry for work in construction, as day laborers, and in the service sector, as gardeners, landscapers, or stable boys on horse ranches. However, too often, they return to harvesting mushrooms. The migrants claim that construction and service work do not provide employment on a year-round basis and that income earning opportunities in both are limited. Positions in these two industries have established work hours, usually no more than eight hours a day, five days a week. In the mushroom industry and greenhouses, they argue, work is at times available beyond 40 hours a week. In addition, they are given the opportunity to earn more per hour in these industries, especially when they are working under the piece rate form of remuneration. Moreover, the workers claim that their jobs in construction and the service sector are not saved for them when they leave for Mexico, a common practice in the mushroom industry.

The Special Agricultural Workers Program

The mushroom industry alone is not responsible for the settlement of thousands of Mexicans in Southern Chester County. Despite the availability of year-round employment, mushroom harvesters did not immigrate in significant numbers prior to the 1980's because of the hardships associated with being in the country illegally. The majority of them were undocumented workers and did not desire to live the remainder of their lives in constant vigilance and hiding from the immigration authorities. They also did not want to subject their loved ones to this hard and clandestine way of life.

The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, commonly known by its acronym, IRCA, would alter this migratory practice of the mushroom workers. Basically, IRCA was to take care of the growing “illegal” immigration problem of the United States by gaining control of undocumented residents in the country, deterring others from entering illegally, and preventing employers from hiring workers without proper immigration documents or inspection. Specifically, the Special Agricultural Workers (SAW) Program, a major legalization program of IRCA, was to legalize the undocumented labor force employed in agriculture before the Immigration and Naturalization Service (I & NS) started to crack down on illegal entries along the US-Mexico border and on undocumented workers within the nation. It would allow illegal, or undocumented, farm workers, to legalize their status in the country, if they met stipulated criteria.

The application period for the SAW Program was from June 1, 1987, to November 30, 1988. The SAW applicants were divided into two categories: Group I and Group II. Group I applicants were individuals who could demonstrate that they had performed at least 90 days of agricultural labor in the United States in each of the three years preceding IRCA; that is, 1983-84, 1984-85, and 1985-86. These workers would receive temporary status and permission to work in the country until 1990, when they could apply for status as permanent resident aliens. Group II applicants were workers who could provide evidence of performing at least 90 days of agricultural labor in the United States between May 1, 1985 and May 1, 1986. The only difference between Group I and Group II applicants was that Group I shifted from temporary permanent status one year earlier than Group II who would qualify for permanent resident status in 1991.

In Chester County, as many undocumented workers in the mushroom industry as possible applied for legalization through the SAW Program; and in some cases, workers who did not qualify, because they did not meet all of the requirements, applied fraudulently and managed to adjust their immigration status as well. In all, according to INS estimates, 1,560 undocumented migrants received SAW status in Chester County (Smith, n.d.:29). Other estimates place the number at 2,000 workers (Smith, 1992). These recipients and others from nearby counties were assisted in the application process by community-based service providers, like La Comunidad Hispana and Catholic Charities, and local mushroom growers. Kaolin Mushroom Farms, the largest mushroom producer in the region, assisted 400 of its undocumented workers to legalize their status in the country through the SAW Program (Babbitt, 1993:16).

Initially, SAWs, or workers who legalized their immigration standing through the SAW Program, were granted temporary resident status and permitted to live and work in the United States legally. Within three years of submitting their paperwork, all of the SAWs were required to adjust their temporary situation to permanent resident status after meeting all the statutory eligibility requirements of the program, such as completing English language courses and demonstrating employment. However, in reality, the adjustment in immigration status would not be completed for seven years. A backlog, due to the unexpectedly large number of applicants from Chester and surrounding counties and a shortage of I & NS personnel, slowed down the process and did not allow for timely interviews and the processing of paperwork.

The SAW Program legalized only the farm workers. The immediate family members, such as spouses and children, were not included in the program, and, in many cases, this resulted in the workers’ being separated from their families. Not only were family members excluded because the program dealt exclusively with farm labor, an occupation which separates the worker from his family during the harvest season, but legalization as a SAW could only apply to the economically active members of families. In other words, family members had to be working in agriculture during the time period specified in the program’s guidelines.

Legally, as temporary residents, SAWs could not sponsor their spouses and children for immigration into the country. Family members had to wait until the SAW was granted permanent resident status, at which time he could submit applications for each of his immediate family members, but they would have to wait in Mexico until their cases were reviewed by the INS. Despite the legal prohibitions against it, many SAWs, banking on becoming permanent residents in the near future, began to by pass the law and bring their families to Southern Chester County illegally. The rationale behind their actions was that, since they were bound to become permanent residents, they would bring their families first and legalize them later. After all, they had entered the country in this fashion and adjusted their immigration status afterwards.¹⁵

Some of the SAWs who waited until they were granted permanent resident status ended up doing the same thing. Because of the waiting time involved, which in some cases was up to five years or more, they by passed the application procedures and sent for their families in Mexico without proper immigration authorization.

Data from non-census sources reveals that the number of Mexican families settling in the area was on the rise in the early 1990's, when many SAWs were making the transition from temporary worker status to permanent resident status. For example, community-based service providers, such as La Comunidad Hispana, which provides health and medical attention to uninsured residents in Southern Chester County, noted an increase in new Mexican families seeking its assistance since 1990 (Druly, 1993). In 1992 alone, La Comunidad Hispana witnessed an increase of 230 Mexican families in the Southern Chester County (Druly, personal communication, November, 1993). Findings from the Catholic Confirmation of Christian Doctrine (CCD) census support this observation in Kennett Square, Toughkenamon, Oxford, West Grove, and Avondale. This census is taken every year to identify new Catholic families and to recruit their children into catechism classes. According to the CCD Census, the 364 Latino families enumerated in 1990, the vast majority of whom were Mexican, increased to 408 in 1992 (Depman, 1993). Moreover, the parishes baptized over 60 Latino children in 1993 alone, again many of them Mexican (Depman, personal communication, November, 1993).

The newly settled families created immigrant networks connecting a number of campesino, or peasant, communities in Mexico to Pennsylvania. Before, the networks were mainly made up of migrant mushroom harvesters and, as such, they linked workers in Mexico to jobs in the mushroom industry. Workers in Mexico would learn about the availability of employment and the prevailing wages through kin and friends in the networks, and on the basis of this information, they would decide whether or not they should migrate. These early networks, as can be seen, were instrumental in regulating the flow of workers across the border and, as a result, no more than could be employed within a given time in the industry made their way to Southern Chester County. Migrants who migrated outside of existing networks often found themselves without employment and would have no choice but to move on to other areas in search of work.



The relatively new immigrant networks are not tied to the mushroom industry, at least, not directly. Nonetheless, they do link kin members from communities in Mexico to those in Pennsylvania. In the early migrant networks, the contacts and flow of information were limited to a number of males in their productive years from particular communities in Mexico. The immigrant networks extend beyond these males and their kin and now include the kin of their wives, and, as a result, the networks are now larger in size and embody women and an increasing number of children. Not only are immigrant networks larger and more diverse, but their role in regulating the flow of Mexican migrants and immigrants into the region has diminished. If anything, since these new networks are no longer directly linked to employment in the mushroom industry but are now associated with the availability of kin in the area, more Mexicans than before are arriving and settling in Southern Chester County. The new immigrants are creating a larger permanent Mexican base in Southern Chester County than existed in previous decades.

Conclusions

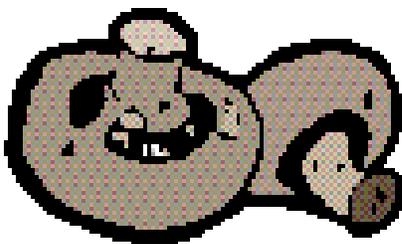
In Southern Chester County, Pennsylvania, the settled Mexican population is relatively new. Twenty years ago, Mexicans were not immigrating into the area; they were only migrating and staying on a seasonal basis. Today, however, many of these early migrants are settling down with their families. The more successful of their lot are also opening businesses of their own and growing mushrooms as independent producers. These new immigrants and their children, like their European predecessors, are creating enclaves, where immigrants and migrants alike will be able to seek solace, housing, and employment in the decades that follow.

Events similar to those in California, which resulted in the emergence and the growth of Mexican enclaves, took place in Southern Chester County, as well. In short, year-round employment opportunities in the mushroom industry, together with the SAW program, enabled the once migratory Mexican workers to settle in the county. The mushroom industry started the enclave process in motion, and the SAW Program fueled it. In the 1980's, mushroom yields increased by a little over 80% and production went year-round, creating a need for "permanent" workers. Later in the decade, the SAW Program facilitated the immigration and the settlement of many mushroom harvesters and their families in the region. Some of the SAWs, tired of waiting and contending with bureaucratic red tape, sponsored and brought their family members from Mexico without going through the proper immigration channels.

By legalizing undocumented workers and unintentionally encouraging the immigration of their dependents, the SAW Program expanded kinship and friendship networks that facilitate more migration and immigration. Relatives and friends in these networks give prospective immigrants or migrants in Mexico job leads or line them up with employment and, when money is available, offer them a loan to cover the expenses of their trip north. Upon their arrival, established kin provide them with lodging and food until they are able to find a place of their own. If space permits, the newly arrived workers join their resident kin and friends. Moreover, they familiarize the workers with local community life, showing them the ropes, and provide them with moral support.

With passing time, Mexican immigrants gradually leave the mushroom industry for work in light manufacturing and services. As they leave and create openings, other Mexican laborers, usually migrants, fill their positions in the harvest crews. Central American migrants have not ventured into the region like they have in many other parts of the country; and the Puerto Ricans refuse to return to an industry that turned its back on them over two decades ago. Additionally, as the 1993 mushroom strike demonstrated, U.S.-based laborers, citizen and foreign alike, within the vicinity of Southern Chester County do not tolerate low incomes and hard work. During the 1993 strike, producers sought workers from a labor contracting firm that hired Vietnamese, Cambodian, and other working poor from Philadelphia, only to find that they were not skilled in harvesting mushrooms and, as a result, were very slow and did not maintain quality, complained about the working conditions, and after a few days would not return.

It appears that Mexicans will continue to settle as long as they remain the labor force of choice in the mushroom industry. The SAW Program will enable some of them to immigrate legally with their families, while others will settle regardless of the legality of their immigration status.



Endnotes

- 1 The data in the paper, unless otherwise noted in the text, is from an eight-month ethnographic study of Kennett Square and Toughkenamon, Penn. The objective of the study was twofold: one, to assess the role of the mushroom industry in creating Mexican enclaves in the communities of Southern Chester County; two, to collect data on the migrant workers in the area for the U.S. Census Bureau. The Census Bureau sought background information on the migrants, such as travel patterns, residence practices, and work histories, that would improve the enumeration of this group in the next decennial census. During his 8-month residency, from September 1993 through April 1994, this writer lived among resident and migratory Mexican mushroom workers, and systematically examined the migratory, settlement, and work practices of 25 immigrants and 25 migrants using traditional ethnographic field methods, such as participant observation, informal interviews, and constructing genealogies. Field trips were also made to mushroom houses and labor camps in the region. A detailed discussion of the methods employed in the study can be found in a report written for the Census Bureau by Garcia and Gonzalez (1995).

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This writer also acknowledges the assistance of his colleague, Dr. Laura Gonzalez, who was very instrumental in collecting field data. Dr. Gonzalez is currently a professor and researcher at the Escuela de Economía y Facultad de Filosofía, Letras e Historia, Universidad de Guanajuato, Guanajuato, Mexico.

- 2 The term “Latinos” refers to people whose origins are in Latin America. This population includes U.S. citizens removed from Latin America over many generations, but who acknowledge and trace their rich heritage to Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and what is commonly referred to as South America.
- 3 The 20 municipalities are Avondale, West Nottingham, East Nottingham, Upper Oxford, Lower Oxford, Penn, New London, Elk, Franklin, London Grove, West Marlboro, East Marlboro, New Garden, London Britain, Kennett, Kennett Square, Newlin, Pocopson, Pennsbury, and Birmingham.
- 4 Traditionally, there has been a differential net undercount between Whites and other ethnic groups in decennial censuses. For example, according to the Census Bureau’s Post Enumeration Survey (PES), a nation-wide survey designed to measure coverage of the 1990 census, the census enumerated approximately 98% of all people nation-wide. However, this survey also revealed that there was a differential net undercount of racial and ethnic minorities. According to the PES, the net census undercount for Latinos in the 1990 census was

estimated at 5.2%. The corresponding rates for African-Americans was 4.8%, for Asian and Pacific Islanders, 3.1%, and for American Indians, 5.0% (Hogan, 1990).

In order to better understand the reasons for the differential net undercount and other types of census errors, the U.S. Census Bureau, through its Center for Survey Methods Research, commissioned independent ethnographic studies in 1990. In these studies, anthropologists who were studying ethnic minority communities were recruited and contracted to conduct “alternative enumerations” in selected housing tracts, where they were well known and trusted by the local populace. In all, 25 research sites were selected across the country, including in Puerto Rico, on the basis of the concentration of Latinos, African Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans. Ten were Latino sites, of which only three were chosen because of their farm worker residents. All three of the studies found evidence of undercounts in the official counts. Although these studies do not provide valid statistical estimates, they provide valuable insight into the causes of census omissions and other erroneous counts among ethnic and racial minorities.

- 5 The objective of the program is to ensure that the migrant children, or children whose parents are employed in agriculture, “receive educational services necessary to develop to their fullest potential so that they become productive and participating members of our society” (Migrant Education Program, 1997). The services include the after-school homework assistance program, college upward bound, and career orientation workshops, to name a few. Parent participation is a major component of the program. Educational activities are taught to and shared with the parents in order to instruct them on how to facilitate learning and become advocates for their children in the schools (Migrant Education Program, 1997).
- 6 As will be discussed in greater detail later, the SAW Program was aimed at legalizing the undocumented, or illegal, work force in the agricultural industry, provided that applicants meet stipulated criteria.
- 7 In the spring of 1993, a number of workers employed by Kaolin Mushroom Farms staged a walk out to bring attention to the low wages and poor working conditions in the industry. Soon after, they formed a union, *Union de Trabajadores* (the Workers’ Union), with the help of a New Jersey-based labor organizing group, the *Comite De Apoyo a Los Trabajadores Agricolas* (Farmworkers Support Committee), known locally by its acronym, CATA, and declared a strike. Daily public demonstrations in support of the workers’ actions were held outside of Kaolin Mushroom Farms by local supporters during the short-lived strike. In addition, some of the workers and a number of strike sympathizers marched on Harrisburg, accompanied by actor Martin Sheen, to generate public support for their cause. The march lasted for a week and received much media attention. Afraid of being blacklisted in the industry, many of the strikers eventually returned to work after a couple of months or returned to Mexico. However, the strike organizers were dismissed by Kaolin management.

- 8 This writer, while looking for housing, was surprised by the many negative comments made by landlords about Mexican tenants. On a few occasions, the property owners blatantly stated that they would never rent to Mexicans and gave their reasons. They claimed that Mexicans had too many children; were dirty and untidy; and congregated outside of their homes and drank beer all night. When he informed them that he was of Mexican descent because his parents were from Mexico, they did not believe him. They would say something to the effect of: “You can’t be. You look Spanish, not Mexican.”
- 9 The agricultural restructuring hypothesis is premised on the work of anthropologist Walter Goldschmidt (1978). His hypothesis was that large-scale farming, “industrial agriculture” as he called it, creates poor social conditions in surrounding communities, such as “relative degrees of social equity, relative amounts of social homogeneity and participation, and relative amounts of social services and of economic opportunity.” This type of farming, he argued, introduces a larger number of seasonal, underemployed, and underpaid laborers into regional towns, and in turn they produce unstable, undemocratic, and impoverished communities. Although Goldschmidt’s hypothesis was designed to explain social, economic, and political changes in farming communities and their correlation to poverty, when modified, as Palerm and his colleagues did, it can also be used to explain the influx of “new” laborers into a region.
- 10 The Bracero Program was an “emergency” bilateral labor agreement between Mexico and the United States in which the former was to provide the agricultural industry of the latter with labor. The program was to remain in effect only during World War II, but under the auspices of Public Law 78, it was extended until 1964. The workers recruited through the Bracero Program were to work no more than six months in any given year. However, many of them would stay beyond their contract period. They primarily worked in agriculture and the railroads, as day laborers.
- 11 Year-round production was not always possible. Up to about the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, mushrooms were grown only in the fall, winter, and spring. In the summers, when the temperature and humidity in the area rose significantly, production would come to a virtual standstill because the growing conditions were no longer ideal. Although the first air conditioning systems for mushroom production were developed as early as the 1930’s, they were not implemented until four decades later because of the high expenditures associated with purchasing and maintaining them. Since then, the costs of the systems have gone down, making them affordable to most of the growers. Those who could not afford them went out of business.

12 Mushrooms are an extremely perishable and need to be grown near markets. Chester County is ideally located for the marketing of this crop, given that it is within 24 hours by refrigerated truck of major metropolitan areas (Brosius, 1987).

13 According to the U.S. Agricultural Census, the number of mushroom farms and square feet under mushroom production have declined over the years. The number of mushroom producers decreased from 233 in 1982 to 133 in 1987; square feet under mushroom production decreased from 22,528,461 in 1982 to 14,965,246 in 1987 (U.S. Census of Agriculture, 1981; 1984; 1987).

14 Immigrants and migrants alike have tried their luck elsewhere before migrating to Chester County to work in the mushroom industry. Almost all of the respondents in the ethnographic sample reported working in other parts of the country, namely California, Texas, Illinois, and New Jersey. In all four states, they worked in agriculture and construction. In the Chicago metropolitan area, they labored in factories and restaurants.

15 In late June, 1997, this writer returned to Southern Chester County for a week to bring up to date segments of his data base. He was surprised to discover that entire families were residing in the boroughs and townships without proper immigration documents. After inquiring, he found that many of them are under the false impression that another legalization program will take place in the very near future, within two or three years. They believe that, if the entire family is residence, all of the family members will qualify for amnesty.

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