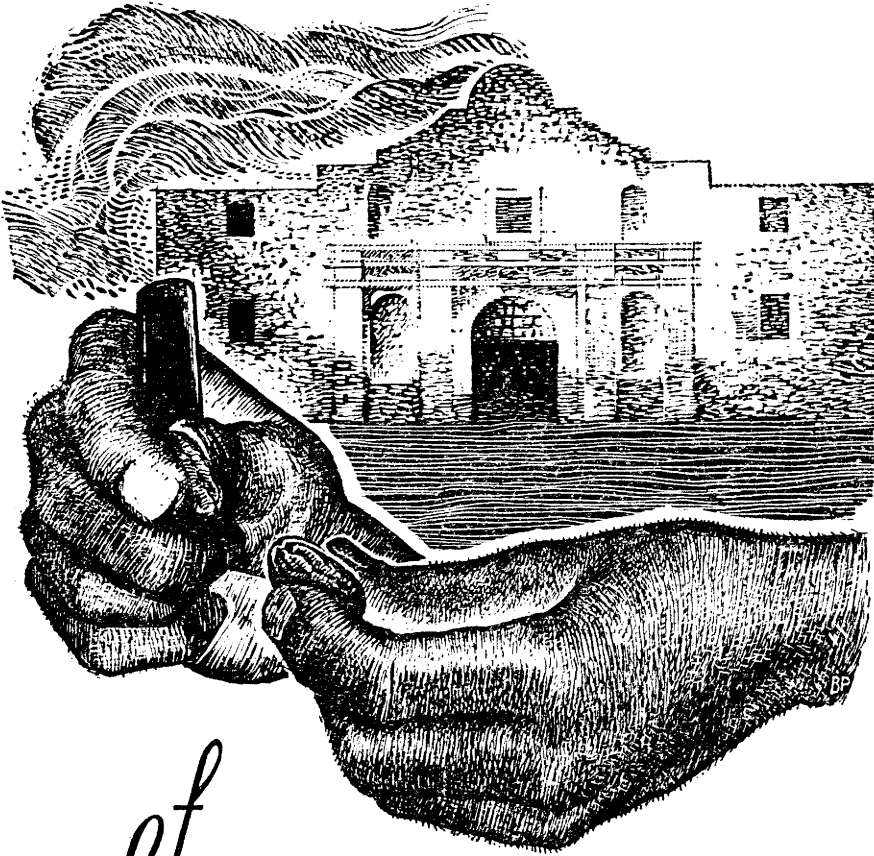


# *The* PECAN SHELLERS



*of*  
**SAN ANTONIO**

FEDERAL WORKS AGENCY  
WORK PROJECTS ADMINISTRATION  
DIVISION OF RESEARCH

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*Corrington Gill, Assistant Commissioner*  
DIVISION OF RESEARCH  
*Howard B. Myers, Director*

# THE PECAN SHELLERS OF SAN ANTONIO

The Problem of Underpaid  
and Unemployed Mexican Labor

By

Selden C. Menefee  
and  
Orin C. Cassmore

Under the supervision of  
John N. Webb  
Chief, Social Research Section  
Division of Research

*U.S. Works projects administration*  
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## Letter of Transmittal

WORK PROJECTS ADMINISTRATION,  
*Washington, D. C., August 16, 1939.*

SIR: I transmit herewith an analysis of the situation and prospects of the Mexican pecan shellers of San Antonio, one of the most depressed groups of workers in the lower one-third of our population.

The Work Projects Administration receives frequent requests for emergency allocations of funds to assist special groups of needy unemployed. Such a request was received from San Antonio late in 1938. The local relief situation, already a serious problem of long standing, was further aggravated at that time by the shutdown of the pecan-shelling industry in that area following the application of the Fair Labor Standards Act. Here were several thousand Mexican workers who had formerly shelled pecans by hand on a piecework basis, with earnings which averaged \$2.75 a week or less. Obviously these workers had nothing to fall back on during the extended period of unemployment which threatened them.

After a preliminary investigation showing the need for such an emergency allocation, the Administration initiated a survey of the pecan-shelling industry and its workers in order to determine the seriousness and probable duration of the problem at hand. The results of the survey are given in this report, which is one of a series of special reports on migratory and low-paid seasonal workers.

The pecan-shelling industry has operated in the past on a basis of a low capital investment and an extremely low wage structure. An important step toward improving the conditions of this depressed group was the enactment of the Fair Labor Standards Act. Application of the act, however, necessarily involved mechanization of the industry if the 25-cent hourly minimum wage was to be paid. This in turn meant the displacement of a part of the labor force.

If the trend toward mechanization thus set in motion continues, wages and living standards among employed Mexicans will probably be stabilized on a higher level than ever before, but it is also probable that unemployment will become a long-term problem among a large number of the Mexicans in San Antonio. Handicapped as they are by poverty, lack of training, and race discrimination, they find it extremely difficult to find new jobs. Agriculture, like pecan shelling, is being mechanized, and can absorb only a small part of

#### IV • LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

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the displaced labor force for a part of the year. Only widespread economic recovery can result in the elimination of unemployment among the former pecan shellers. In the meantime public assistance will be necessary to keep the jobless Mexicans from suffering severe privation.

The present study is concerned mainly with the year 1938, a crucial period in the pecan industry and in the lives of the pecan shellers. That year, which was probably slightly less prosperous than 1937, is believed to be fairly representative of the depression period as a whole as far as the Mexicans in the pecan-shelling industry were concerned.

The study was made by the Division of Research under the direction of Howard B. Myers, Director of the Division. The collection and analysis of the data were supervised by John N. Webb, Chief, Social Research Section. The report was prepared by Selden C. Menefee and Orin C. Cassmore. Special acknowledgment is made to Rebecca Pfefferman, who assisted in the preparation of the data, and to H. P. Drought, Mrs. Val Keating, Miriam Noll, A. S. Evans, George Lambert, and Carroll R. Daugherty, who read and criticized various portions of the report in its preliminary phases.

Respectfully submitted.

CORRINGTON GILL,  
*Assistant Commissioner.*

COL. F. C. HARRINGTON,  
*Commissioner of Work Projects.*

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# **The Pecan Shellers of San Antonio**

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## INTRODUCTION

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**T**HE IMPACT of constant technological change is felt today by workers in all industries, including those which have long been mechanized. Even when the introduction of new machinery comes gradually and over a period of years, many of the displaced workers find it difficult to obtain work in other industries.<sup>1</sup> The full impact of changing production methods falls most heavily, however, on workers in those industries in which there is a sudden and complete change from handwork to a machine-work basis of operation, either as a result of competition or regulative legislation. When mechanization is introduced almost overnight, as it was at the close of 1938 in the case of the pecan shellers of San Antonio, Tex., the distress of the displaced workers is immediate and extreme.

During the 1920's, when our economy was expanding rapidly, the more adaptable of the displaced workers eventually found their way into other lines of work, particularly in newly developed industries. Those tending to be absorbed most easily were skilled workers between the ages of 25 and 35 years.<sup>2</sup> The period of readjustment may have been shortened by a shift to another industrial center or by a change of occupation, or lengthened by inability to move or to acquire skill in new lines of work; but eventually the great majority of the displaced workers were able to find jobs of some sort.

Since the onset of the depression the difficulties facing displaced workers have of course increased. This has been especially true when mechanization occurred in low-wage industries employing the least

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, R. J. Myers found that of 370 Chicago men's-clothing cutters displaced by changes in the organization of the manufacturing process from 1919 to 1926, 7 percent had found no work at all as late as 1928. Less than one-third of the cutters were reemployed immediately and almost half were out of work for at least 4 months. "Occupational Readjustment of Displaced Skilled Workmen," *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 37, August 1929, pp. 473-489. See also Lubin, Isador, *The Absorption of the Unemployed by American Industry*, Washington, D. C.: Brookings Institution, 1929; and Weintraub, David, "Unemployment and Increasing Productivity," *Technological Trends and National Policy*, National Resources Committee, Washington, D. C., 1937, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> Weintraub, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

skilled among the working population. One result has been the increased dependence of displaced workers on the various Federal work programs.

Social legislation such as the Fair Labor Standards (Wage-Hour) Act, designed to improve wages and working conditions, may result temporarily in aggravating this problem of technological unemployment, while solving or helping to solve the problem of sub-standard wages in low-wage industries. This sort of legislation has the greatest effect in areas where general standards of living are low and opportunities for alternative employment are few—regions where a supply of “cheap and docile” labor makes it possible for marginal, low-wage industries to exist. Such industries, when required to raise wages even to a bare subsistence level, may face the dilemma of going out of business or adopting improvements in production practices which they have previously resisted for the very simple reason that men were cheaper than machines.

In either case the problem of the displaced worker becomes vitally important to the community at large. Private business is unable to supply enough new jobs, and no agency short of the Federal Government is able to help all of the displaced workers through their periods of unemployment. The workers themselves have usually earned too little to tide them over their adjustment periods; their relatives and friends are as a rule no better off; and migration of unskilled workers to look for jobs in other regions is as hazardous as it is futile during a period of widespread unemployment. Public assistance is therefore required in order to bridge the gap between loss of job and new employment.

This was the situation confronting the public officials and relief authorities of San Antonio when several thousand Mexican pecan shellers were thrown out of work by the pecan-shelling industry, which closed down late in October 1938 rather than meet the provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act.

San Antonio's pecan shellers had long been one of the most depressed groups of industrial workers in the country. The pecan-shelling industry had come to depend on the cheapest type of labor. At one time mechanized to some extent, the industry reverted to a handwork basis during the depression, when the presence of a large amount of cheap Mexican labor caused wages to be driven so low as to make handwork profitable once more. At the time when the Fair Labor Standards Act became effective and the shut-down occurred, employment was approaching its winter peak and the shelling plants were employing a larger number of workers than any other industry in San Antonio—some 8,000 Mexican men, women, and children—at wages averaging approximately 5 cents an hour.



All the elements which make for a formidable unemployment problem were present in the pecan-shelling industry. The shutdown was for a time absolute and industry-wide in San Antonio; the displaced workers were for the most part unskilled laborers, and no local industries were available to absorb them. It soon became apparent that pecan shelling would not be resumed again in most of the local plants until thorough mechanization had taken place.

The situation was paradoxical. The operators of pecan-shelling plants in the South condemned the Fair Labor Standards Act, claiming that it had in this instance caused practically a complete cessation of employment for workers in the industry; but closer inspection showed that although San Antonio operators claimed they could not continue to run their plants if they had to pay the 25-cent hourly minimum wage, operators of mechanized plants in other parts of the country, and even in other parts of Texas, were already paying the minimum scale when the Fair Labor Standards Act became effective. The mechanization of pecan shelling in San Antonio was necessary to enable the industry to operate on a paying basis under the Fair Labor Standards Act. This meant, however, not only a period of delay while new machines were being installed, but also the displacement of about two-thirds of the handwork shellers.

Within a few days after the closing of the shelling plants the situation of many of the pecan workers was desperate. That few had any savings to fall back on is not surprising in view of the low weekly average wage which had been prevalent in the hand-shelling plants. So low had wages been that many of the Mexicans had been forced to apply for public aid even while they were working in pecans.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the distress caused by inadequate food following the shutdown, an increasing number of pecan shellers were evicted when they were unable to pay their rent. Many families "doubled up" in the houses of friends or relatives. With winter coming on, they had no money for fuel, blankets, or winter clothing. Illness, already much more prevalent among the Mexicans than in the rest of the community, increased.

A marked increase in applications for public assistance resulted almost immediately from this situation. No direct cash relief other than old-age assistance had been distributed in San Antonio since 1936; hence the Works Progress Administration and the local agency distributing surplus commodities were besieged with appeals for assistance. An emergency allocation sufficient for the employment

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<sup>3</sup> In October 1938 (before the shutdown) more than a thousand pecan shellers' families were receiving surplus commodities, and several hundred others were receiving assistance from WPA, NYA, and other agencies. This assistance operated as a virtual subsidy to the pecan-shelling industry.

of 1,800 Mexicans, formerly pecan shellers, was made by WPA early in 1939.

The Fair Labor Standards Act succeeded in stimulating the installation of modern machinery in the shelling plants and in forcing the payment of higher wages to many of the shellers who eventually regained employment. The minimum wage of 25 cents an hour constituted a marked increase for workers who had been trying to exist on a fifth of that amount. If this level of compensation, or the 30-cent hourly wage prescribed after the first year of the law's operation, becomes prevalent both in pecan shelling and in other lines of work where Mexicans are extensively employed, a virtual revolution in living standards will take place in this depressed economic group. Complete compliance with the Wage-Hour Act, the extension of social legislation to cover agricultural labor and other fields not now covered, and the solution of the unemployment problem will all be necessary, however, before conditions among the Mexicans as a group will approach the "American standard of living."

The San Antonio pecan-shelling industry provided an unusual opportunity to study the results of the displacement of unskilled workers, who have the most difficulty in finding new places in private industry. Here was a situation, developing within a brief space of time, that was similar in many respects to what has been happening more gradually throughout the country during the depression years. The concern of the WPA is obvious, since it is the agency charged with the task of aiding the able-bodied unemployed in distress, whether their difficulties come from technological change or from fluctuations in business activity.

This report presents the findings of a study conducted by the Division of Research, Works Progress Administration, into the pecan-shelling industry and the plight of the Mexican workers who have been displaced by the rapid technological changes which have been taking place in that industry. The report examines the characteristics of a representative group of 512 Mexican families attached to the pecan-shelling industry, past and present trends in the industry, the earnings of the pecan shellers, the conditions under which they work and live, and the social results of these conditions. The report also devotes some space to a discussion of the future prospects of the workers formerly in the shelling industry.

Although the data presented here apply only to the Mexican pecan shellers, and were gathered only in San Antonio, the study has much wider implications. In the first place, the industry discussed is an excellent example of a low-wage handwork industry, and the problems it faces during a period of transformation to modern methods may give some clues to the problems other industries face under

similar circumstances. In the second place, the long-range problems faced by San Antonio Mexicans in a period of depression and technological change are much the same as those faced by Mexican populations in other cities, both in the Southwest and in other parts of the country. Finally, the problem of relief and public assistance for large groups of persons who have been displaced by technological changes in industry is one which has presented itself to many American communities, particularly during the depression period.

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## SUMMARY

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**THE PROBLEM** of underpaid and unemployed Mexican labor in the pecan-shelling industry of San Antonio was called dramatically to the Nation's attention in October 1938, when the industry closed down following the passage of the Wage-Hour Act. Extreme distress followed the shutdown because of the depressed conditions which had prevailed in the Mexican community throughout the depression period, and earlier.

### THE PECAN-SHELLING INDUSTRY

San Antonio has been a center of the shelling industry for more than 50 years. About half of the Nation's seedling (native) pecans have been shelled there each year during the past decade. The proximity of the huge Texas pecan-growing area and the presence of a large supply of cheap Mexican labor combined to make the industry flourish.

Until a decade ago the trend in the pecan industry was toward mechanization. Machines for the grading and cracking of the nuts were widely used, although machines for facilitating hand-picking of pecans from the shell were in a relatively rudimentary stage as yet. Shelling plant operators in St. Louis and other cities continued to use and to improve machinery throughout the depression, but in San Antonio machines were gradually scrapped in favor of hand labor.

There were two main reasons for this reversal of the usual trend toward more modern production methods. One was the fact that thousands of Mexican workers were available to the operators at piecework rates averaging as low as \$1 or \$2 per week during the depth of the depression. This made hand labor less expensive than the installation and upkeep of machinery. The other factor was increasingly sharp competition in the shelling industry, particularly after the advent of the Southern Pecan Shelling Co. in 1926. This company depended entirely on hand labor, and came to dominate the shelling industry in San Antonio and the South.

With hand shelling came the contracting system, under which there were as many as 400 small shops operating at one time, with 12,000 or more workers employed. Low wages, long hours, and bad sanitary and working conditions were prevalent in the contractors' shops. The contractors were to all intents and purposes employees of the large pecan dealers, who controlled the supply of nuts and set the prices for shelling.

Three attempts have been made to raise wages and stabilize the pecan-shelling industry. The first, by the National Recovery Administration, failed when a dispute between the Northern and Southern shellers resulted in the code being rendered ineffective. Following this, several attempts were made by unions to organize the workers in the industry, culminating in a strike early in 1938. The result was recognition of the Congress of Industrial Organizations union by several companies, including the largest operator, the Southern Pecan Shelling Co.

Finally, there was the Fair Labor Standards Act. When it was passed, the San Antonio shelling operators made no attempt to modernize their production methods in order to be able to meet the 25-cent minimum wage when the act became effective. Instead they speeded up production during the summer of 1938 in preparation for a showdown on the act, and continued to pay rates averaging 5 to 8 cents per hour to their workers. The Southern Pecan Shelling Co. maintained that the pecan shellers were exempt from the law as processors of agricultural products within the area of production. When this view was not upheld, the company applied for a temporary "learners' exemption," which was also refused. While waiting for a decision on the exemption, the larger companies had started to experiment with the newest types of shelling machinery, and by March 1939 more than 1,800 pecan shellers were back at work, mainly in the mechanized plants. Production per worker under the new, modern conditions was approximately three times as high as it had been under the handwork system. It became apparent that if mechanization continued, less than 3,000 pecan shellers would be required in San Antonio, in place of the 10,000 or more who had found employment during the peak season each year prior to 1938.

The smaller operators who could not afford to install machinery, however, evaded the wage-hour law when they reopened a few weeks after the initial shutdown. As the 1938-39 season progressed, hand shelling at low wages and shelling in the homes of farmers and people in the small towns outside of San Antonio became so extensive that by June 1939 they threatened the whole wage structure initiated by the Fair Labor Standards Act.

### CHARACTERISTICS AND EARNINGS OF THE PECAN WORKERS

All of the 512 pecan workers interviewed in the present survey were Mexicans, and a majority were men. Most of them had come to Texas from Mexico between 1910 and 1930. They had come to San Antonio originally to find work, and 4 out of every 10 had been working in pecans since 1931 or earlier. Aside from pecan work, few had any training or experience except in unskilled labor in agriculture or industry. Opportunities for Mexicans were very limited in skilled or semiskilled work.

An analysis of the earnings of the pecan shellers in 1938 indicated that here was one of the lowest-paid groups of industrial workers in the United States. Their average<sup>1</sup> annual family income was \$251 for a family of 4.6 persons. Only 2 percent of the families had incomes of \$900 or more in 1938.

The basis for these low annual incomes lay in the wage scale paid to workers in pecan shelling and other industries employing Mexican unskilled labor. The average weekly income reported by individuals in pecan work was \$2.73, which was even lower than the average income in agricultural work, \$3.50 per week. Combining all jobs reported by the pecan shellers' families in 1938, the average income per worker was \$3.01 per week, for an average work week of 51 hours. Incomes, of course, increased with size of family, number of workers in family, total time spent at work, and employment at semiskilled or skilled labor.

Almost a quarter of the pecan shellers' families supplemented their earnings in San Antonio by working at agricultural labor in Texas and outside the State during part of the year. Most of these picked cotton within the State, but some traveled north to work in the sugar-beet fields. Those families which migrated to the beet and cotton fields in the summer earned an average of \$285 during 1939, compared with \$238 received by nonmigratory families. More than a third of the families, too, had one or more members working at miscellaneous types of jobs to supplement their income from pecan shelling. Yet the average family studied, with two workers, had a total income of only about 69 cents per day in 1938.

An important result of the low wages prevalent among the Mexicans is that in lines of work where they compete with members of other races for jobs, wage scales are forced downward. This is a contributing factor to the low wages which prevail generally in San Antonio.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "average," when used to refer to statistical data obtained in the field survey, means the median and is so used throughout the report.

### SOCIAL CONDITIONS AMONG THE PECAN SHELLERS

One result of the low wages and poverty among the pecan shellers was the dependence of large numbers of them on relief. Even while the shelling plants were operating at full speed, wages were so low that hundreds of shellers depended on public assistance in some form or other for part of their livelihood. After the shutdown of the plants demands for aid became more acute. In January 1939 about half of the Mexicans in San Antonio were receiving or had recently received public aid.

Other results of the Mexicans' poverty were to be seen in their overcrowded housing conditions, poor health, low educational level, and social disorganization. Crowded into old shanties with an average of more than two persons to the room, three-fourths of the pecan shellers could not afford electric lights and almost nine-tenths did not have inside plumbing. Overcrowding and malnutrition contributed to the high death rate prevailing among Mexicans, particularly from tuberculosis and infant diseases. Migratory work patterns and lack of money for clothes and shoes tended to discourage school attendance. The Mexicans were able to do little to correct these conditions; few of them had access to the ballot, and racial discrimination constituted an additional handicap.

### PROSPECTS FOR THE PECAN WORKERS

The future of the displaced pecan shellers depends to a great extent on whether the shelling plant operators observe the provisions of the wage-hour law. If the law is evaded, the pecan-shelling industry will undoubtedly regress toward its former status as a handwork industry, with extensive employment during certain seasons, but wages far lower than a dollar per day. In such a case, however, handwork would probably not completely replace the machines that are already installed, and average wages would probably not fall quite as low, nor conditions be quite as bad, as they were before the advent of the Fair Labor Standards Act.

If mechanization continues, the primary effect will be to raise living standards among Mexicans who are employed to a level comparable to workers of other races. San Antonio will, however, face the problem of providing for several thousand unemployed Mexicans who will be permanently stranded without work during at least part of each year. Employment in migratory agricultural work is decreasing rather than increasing. There are few signs that the Mexicans will move to other places or that new industries will absorb very many of them. Nor is it likely, in view of their extreme poverty, that they will be able to help themselves to any great extent by cooperative action.



These Mexican workers have been displaced from the shelling industry through no fault of their own, and have not the skills nor the resources which would enable them to adapt themselves to the changing situation. Their problem, although more acute, is qualitatively similar to that of other unemployed workers who have lost their places in private industry during the depression period because of the rapid mechanization of production. More adequate relief would help them temporarily, but what they really need are jobs and economic security. There is little likelihood that jobs will be forthcoming for the Mexicans, however, until the larger problem of technological unemployment throughout the Nation is solved.

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# Chapter I

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## THE PECAN-SHELLING INDUSTRY IN SAN ANTONIO

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**I**F THE problem of unemployment among the Mexican pecan shellers of San Antonio is to be understood, some knowledge of the shelling industry and of the people who work in it is essential. The low wages and irregular employment which have prevailed in the shelling plants can be explained only in the light of this background.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LABOR FORCE

For at least a decade the labor force of the pecan-shelling industry in San Antonio has been recruited almost exclusively from the Mexican community. The only exceptions have been a few foremen and superintendents in the larger shelling plants; all the work of cracking the nuts, and of "picking" them (from the shells), which occupies the great majority of the industry's labor force, has been done by Mexicans.<sup>1</sup>

All of the 512 pecan shellers interviewed in the present survey were Mexicans. They represented a fair cross section of the workers in San Antonio's pecan-shelling industry in 1938.<sup>2</sup> All were heads of families or members of families in which pecan shelling was the

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<sup>1</sup> The term "Mexican" is here used to designate a racial and cultural group, rather than a nationality. A large majority of the Mexicans resident in San Antonio are citizens of the United States.

<sup>2</sup> Because of the closing down of the shelling industry, a great majority of the former pecan shellers had applied for temporary assistance of some kind (usually surplus commodities or church relief) at the time the sample was drawn. Other names were to be found in the records of the CIO Pecan Workers' Union. The names of the 512 pecan workers who were interviewed were therefore obtained from these three sources. Because of the large number of pecan workers who were drawing surplus commodities, approximately half of the persons interviewed were located through this medium; a quarter were located through the Guadalupe Church; and the balance through the union. The interviewing was done during January and February 1939 by a staff of four Spanish-speaking interviewers. The data gathered were for the calendar year 1938, except for certain items concerned with personal characteristics and family backgrounds.

principal source of income. Families whose principal income was from work outside the pecan industry were excluded.

#### Origin of Mexicans

With the exception of a few descendants of Mexican settlers who were in San Antonio when the first Americans arrived, shortly after 1800, nearly all of the Mexicans in San Antonio either came into the United States during the present century or are the children or grandchildren of those who did.

The first peak of Mexican immigration into the United States occurred during and after the World War, when there was a labor shortage throughout the country. A larger group of immigrants came in during the decade of the 1920's, when there was little unemployment, wages were high, and immigration from the Orient had been stopped. The expanding cotton and vegetable industries in Texas needed cheap labor, and Mexico was the most convenient source of supply. The following statement, made before the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, stated the farmers' case for allowing Mexicans to come in:

Mr. Chairman, here is the whole situation in a nutshell. Farming is not a profitable industry in this country, and in order to make money out of this, you have to have cheap labor. \* \* \* In order to allow landowners now to make a profit off their farms, they want to get the cheapest labor they can find, and if they get the Mexican labor, it enables them to make a profit. That is the way it is along the border, and I imagine that is the way it is anywhere else.\*

The number of Mexicans in Texas and in the country as a whole more than tripled from 1910 to 1930 (table 1). San Antonio attracted more than its share of this influx for three reasons: There had always been a considerable colony of Mexicans there, so that the city was attractive to the newer immigrants; San Antonio's location is near the border and accessible to the areas where many Mexicans are used in seasonal agricultural work; and the city's industries used a large amount of cheap Mexican labor. In 1930 there were 82,373 Mexicans in San Antonio, according to the census.

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\* Farm Placement Service, *Survey of Farm Placement in Texas, 1936 and 1937*, Texas State Employment Service, Austin, Tex., 1938, p. 45. See also Taylor, Paul S., *Mexican Labor in the U. S., Dimmitt County, Winter Garden District, South Texas*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1930. The following quotation from J. Middleton, post commander of the American Legion at Uvalde, Tex., indicates that there was some opposition to the ranchers' policy of importing cheap labor from Mexico: "These and the southwest Texas chamber of commerce are interested in cheap labor, quick profits, and to hell with the good of our country." (*Immigration From Countries of the Western Hemisphere*, Hearings Before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, House of Representatives, 71st Cong., 2d sess., March 14, 1930, p. 597.)

**Table 1.**—Mexican Population of Texas and the United States, 1910–1930 <sup>1</sup>

Year	Texas		United States	
	Number	Percent foreign born	Number	Percent foreign born
1910.....	226,466	53.3	367,510	57.5
1920.....	388,675	62.5	700,541	65.3
1930.....	683,681	38.4	1,422,533	43.4

<sup>1</sup> Figures for 1910 and 1920 are estimates based on 1930 data. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930*, Population Vol. II, 1933, pp. 34–44 and Vol. III, Part I, 1932, pp. 27, 32, U. S. Department of Commerce, Washington, D. C.

The records of the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service show that after 1930 more Mexicans left the United States than entered this country. There were two reasons for this. In 1928 and 1929, according to immigration officials, there was an increasing demand that the Government stop Mexican labor from coming in and replacing Americans of European extraction at lower wages. As a result, the State Department ceased granting visas to Mexicans except in special cases, a policy which is still followed. The second factor in reversing the direction of the general movement across the border was, of course, the depression.

San Antonio's Mexican population more than held its own from 1930 on, however. Many Mexican workers came from other parts of Texas and from the manufacturing cities of the North to settle in San Antonio. Mexican farm hands and tenant farmers, displaced by mechanization of cotton farming or by the Agricultural Adjustment Administration crop control program, also drifted into San Antonio.

At the end of 1938 estimates of San Antonio's Mexican population varied from 80,000 <sup>4</sup> to 120,000. <sup>5</sup> The correct figure was probably not far from 100,000, or more than one-third of the estimated total population for the city in 1939.

#### Composition of Pecan Shellers as a Group

The pecan shellers are, for the most part, residents of San Antonio of many years' standing. Of the shellers interviewed who answered the question as to the date of their "arrival in San Antonio," 17 per cent were born in the city. A majority of the balance came to the city between 1911 and 1930. Only 10 per cent came to San Antonio during the depression years after 1930 (table 2).

<sup>4</sup> Estimate of the editor of *La Prensa*, Spanish-language paper, San Antonio, Tex.

<sup>5</sup> Estimate of Prof. Herbert Leies of St. Mary's University, San Antonio, Tex., based on birth and death rates since 1930.

**Table 2.—Date of Pecan Shellers' Arrival in San Antonio**

Year of arrival	Number	Percent
Total.....	479	100
Born in San Antonio.....	80	17
Arrived before 1900.....	37	8
1901-1910.....	70	15
1911-1920.....	138	28
1921-1930.....	105	22
1931 or later.....	49	10

NOTE.—Excludes 33 pecan shellers who did not answer this question.

The pecan shellers and their families, like most Mexican immigrants, came originally from the near-by border states of Mexico. The largest number who named their places of family origin came from the state of Nuevo Leon, just south of Laredo, Tex., in which the industrial city of Monterrey is located. Coahuila, another border state which includes the cities of Saltillo and Piedras Negras, was second in importance; and the states of San Luis Potosi, in the interior, and Tamaulipas, along the lower Rio Grande, followed in the order named.

The typical pecan sheller did not come directly to San Antonio upon arriving in this country. Of the families whose heads were not born in the city, only 41 percent came there directly from Mexico; 56 percent lived elsewhere in Texas, and 3 percent in some other part of the United States, before moving to San Antonio. (See appendix table 1.)

Pecan shelling was definitely not a strong motivating force either in encouraging Mexican immigration into the United States or in drawing the immigrants to San Antonio. Of the pecan shellers who gave definite reasons for moving to San Antonio, 51 percent were impelled by economic motives, most of them saying, "To look for work." Only 2 percent, however, specifically said they had come to work in the pecan-shelling industry. Next to the motive of obtaining employment was that of joining or accompanying parents, husbands, or other relatives. (See appendix table 2.)

Most of the shellers had been working in pecans for several years. Over 40 percent first entered pecan work prior to 1932, and only 11 percent came into the industry after 1936.\*

A majority of the shellers were heads of "normal" (unbroken) families, ranging in size from husband and wife alone to 1 family of 15 persons. There were 158 broken families, of which 82 percent

\* These figures were taken from original tabulations on the San Antonio pecan shellers which are available in the files of the Division of Research, Work Projects Administration. This is true of all figures based on information given by interviewed persons which are not derived from the text and appendix tables in this report.

were headed by women. Only 3 percent were "unattached" persons. (See appendix table 3.)

Among the pecan workers in the families interviewed, men outnumbered women by nearly 2 to 1. This ratio is probably much higher than would obtain in the industry as a whole, since the selection of families with incomes mainly from pecans eliminated many women part-time workers and earners of supplementary wages. The average (median) age of the men was 44 years, while that of the women was only 33 years. The youngest group in the industry was made up of men working as "crackers," whose average age was 29 years. The necessity for speed and deftness, and the large number of finger-maiming accidents, combined to keep the older workers from continuing at this occupation.

Few of the shellers had ever done anything but unskilled work outside the pecan industry. Asked about their "usual occupation" before they started pecan work, 43 percent of all those interviewed stated that they had no usual occupation other than pecan shelling. Over two-thirds of the women gave this reply, as compared with less than one-third of the men.

The usual occupation most frequently named by the men was unskilled labor in manufacturing, including building and construction work. Second in importance, aside from pecan work (classed as semi-skilled), was unskilled work in agriculture. Only 7 percent had been skilled workers or foremen before shelling pecans. Among the women, aside from those whose regular occupation had been pecan shelling, the most important previous activity was that of "housewife or homemaker." (See appendix table 4.)

#### DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDUSTRY

Pecan shelling has been the major source of winter employment for Mexicans in San Antonio throughout the depression period. From 10,000 to nearly 20,000 workers, depending on the size of the crop and the available labor supply, were employed in the shelling plants there each winter from 1933 to 1938.† A brief description of the industry which has had such a great effect on the Mexican workers is presented below.

##### The Growing of Pecans

Pecans are grown in a belt reaching across the Southern States from North Carolina to Texas and Oklahoma. There are two principal types: the seedling (sometimes called native or wild) pecan, which grows wild along the banks of rivers and creeks in Texas, Oklahoma, and the lower Mississippi River States; and the improved (sometimes called cultivated or papershell) pecan, which is grown

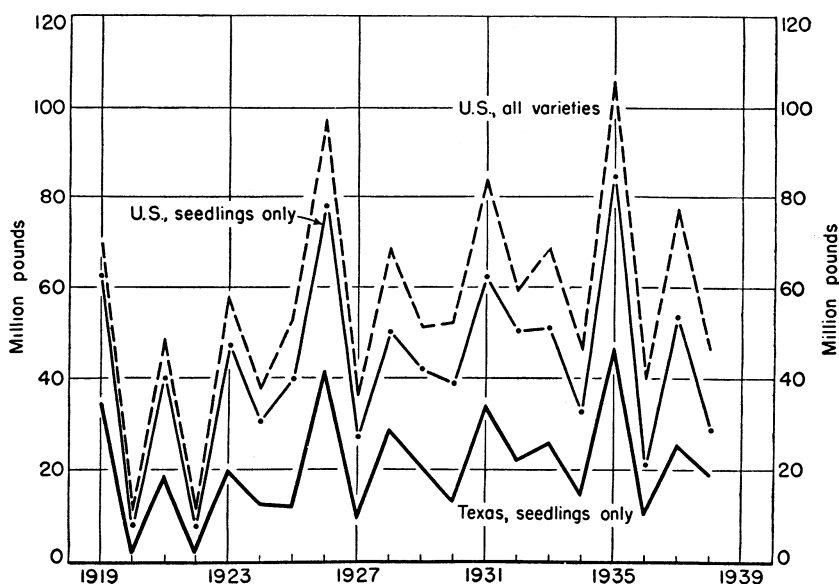
most extensively in Georgia and neighboring States. Nearly all of the improved pecans are sold in the shell, since they are large and easily cracked by the consumer; nearly all of the seedling pecans are shelled before they are sold to wholesalers.

Texas is estimated to have more than 8,000 miles of pecan-lined streams within its borders. The greatest of these in terms of pecan production are the Brazos, Colorado, Trinity, and Nueces Rivers. San Saba County alone, in the upper Colorado River Valley north of San Antonio, has about 200,000 pecan trees. Over the 10-year period 1927-1936 Texas produced an average of 22,543,000 pounds of seedling pecans per year, or about 48 percent of the total seedling crop.<sup>7</sup> (See fig. 1 and appendix tables 5 and 6.)

Seedling pecans vary greatly in type. In eastern Texas they are thin-shelled, running as high as 46 percent meats. In western Texas, however, they are small and hard-shelled, and run as low as 30 percent meats. The west Texas pecans are much more difficult and expensive to shell than those of east Texas.

The fact that in the average year over half of the huge Texas seedling pecan crop is grown within a radius of 250 miles of San

FIG. 1 - PECAN PRODUCTION IN THE UNITED STATES AND IN TEXAS  
1919 - 1938



Source: Appendix table 6.

AF-3074, WPA

<sup>7</sup> Bureau of Agricultural Economics, *Production Bulletin*, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., July 20, 1937.



Antonio has given great impetus to the development of the shelling industry there. An average of only 38 percent of the seedlings by weight is meat, and it is cheaper to ship pecan meats to market from San Antonio than to ship the pecans to cities in other States to be shelled. Partly as a result of this fact, San Antonio has been the center of the pecan-shelling industry in recent years, about half of the Nation's seedling pecans being shelled there.

#### Background of the Shelling Industry

In addition to the proximity of the seedling pecan growing area, two other factors operated to encourage the concentration of shelling in San Antonio. They were the pioneer efforts of San Antonio businessmen in the field of commercial shelling, and the presence of a large supply of cheap Mexican labor.

The first commercial shipment of shelled pecans was made by G. A. Duerler, Sr., in 1882, when he sold 50 barrels of pecan meats in cities on the east coast.<sup>8</sup> As early as the Civil War period, Duerler, a Swiss baker and confectioner, had bartered with the Indians of near-by tribes for the nuts. He hired Mexicans to crack them with railroad spikes and to pick the meats from the shells with tow-sack needles. In 1889 Robert E. Woodson of St. Louis invented a cracking machine operated by the use of a lever. In 1914 the first power-driven cracker was invented by Woodson. Both of these inventions were used in the G. A. Duerler Co. plant.

By 1928 the Duerler Co., then managed by two sons of the elder Duerler, had achieved mechanization of the shelling process to a considerable degree; the nuts were cracked and graded by machine, although the "picking" process was still largely handwork. The cracking machines in use at that time cracked about 1,000 pounds of nuts per day apiece. After being cracked, the nuts were conveyed to the floor below, where they were distributed to nearly 1,000 Mexican girls who picked them out of the shells. The meats were carried to the drying rooms and thoroughly dried to prevent molding. Next they were run over mechanical shakers to remove all small particles, and were carried on a long belt past 15 or 20 girls who removed defective kernels. The meats were then packed in boxes, barrels, packages, tins, or vacuum tumblers.<sup>9</sup>

Mechanization was at its peak in San Antonio at about this time (1928). By a strange reversal of the usual trend, machines were removed and hand labor substituted during the depression, largely

<sup>8</sup> Texas Works Progress Administration, Federal Writers' Project, *San Antonio*, San Antonio: Clegg Co., 1938, p. 36.

<sup>9</sup> Taylor, M. L., "Packaging the Pecan—A New Industry With a Great Future," *Canning Age Magazine*, August 1928.

because of the supply of Mexican labor available at extremely low wages after 1929. By 1933 the R. E. Funsten Co. of St. Louis and a few other Northern firms were the only large pecan-shelling plants in the country remaining on a mechanized basis.

The Duerler and Funsten companies had dominated the pecan-shelling industry for the first quarter of the present century. In 1926 a new competitor appeared in San Antonio: middle-aged Julius Seligmann, who had inherited the property of his father, a wealthy merchant and landowner of Seguin, in Guadalupe County. Seligmann, together with Joe Freeman, organized the Southern Pecan Shelling Co. With a total investment in equipment of only \$50,000, this company did a very large business, the gross amount rising steadily from about \$700,000 in 1930 to over \$3,000,000 in 1936.<sup>10</sup>

From 1935 on Seligmann was unquestionably the dominant figure in the pecan-shelling industry of the South. In that year there was a bumper crop of pecans—105,000,000 pounds in the United States. The Southern Pecan Shelling Co. bought a large part of the surplus of seedling pecans for prices as low as 3 to 6 cents per pound. The following year there was a pecan crop of only 40,000,000 pounds. The Southern Pecan Shelling Co. still had a large part of the 1935 crop in storage, and was able to sell its pecans to the smaller shelling plant operators for about twice what it had paid for them, taking a profit of more than half a million dollars.

Since 1935 the Southern Pecan Shelling Co. has handled from a quarter to a third of the Nation's seedling pecans. The R. E. Funsten Co. of St. Louis is reported normally to handle about a quarter of the seedling pecan crop. These two companies together control the shelling and marketing of the bulk of the Nation's pecan meats.

#### **The Contract System**

Coincident with the growth of the Southern Pecan Shelling Co., the shelling technique used in San Antonio reverted from a state of partial mechanization to a completely handwork basis. This company found the use of hand labor more profitable than the installation of machines. Little capital was required for handwork; old buildings could be used for shelling, and only the simplest equipment was necessary. The Southern Pecan Shelling Co. offered sharp competition to the established operators through the use of handworkers on a large scale.

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<sup>10</sup> These data were obtained in an interview with Julius Seligmann. All material of this type given in this publication referring to the pecan industry or the background of the Mexican community and not supported by documentary references, was derived from personal interviews or from correspondence now in the files of the Division of Research, Work Projects Administration.



*Texas Work Projects Administration.*

*Shelling Pecans by Hand.*

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Under these circumstances even the older companies abandoned such machines as they had developed and went back to handwork. The Mexican shellers apparently acquiesced in this; when one company tried to revive the use of automatic cracking machines in 1936, there was a demand from the shellers that hand cracking be retained so that unemployment among the "crackers" would not be increased and the plan was abandoned.

Since the shelling of pecans by hand required more workers and more space than was available in the principal shelling plants, the large operators gave out most of their pecans to contractors. These contractors were financed and controlled to a great extent by the large companies. Julius Seligmann stated at a hearing before the Industrial Commission of Texas early in 1938 that 30 of the approximately 120 contractors in San Antonio at that time were "his," and spoke of the 5,000 workers in their plants as his employees. He had financed some of these contractors, and all of them were required to buy pecans only from his company and to sell them only to his company, at prices set by the company. The difference between the buying and selling prices was figured so as to give the contractor a margin of between 40 and 60 cents per 100 pounds in the shell. If a contractor did not observe the contract, he could be forced into line or out of business by withholding nuts, by giving him a poor grade of nuts, or by raising the price of nuts.<sup>11</sup>

Many of the contractors had smaller subcontractors, some of them families who shelled the nuts in their homes. In this way the peak of more than 400 shelling establishments<sup>12</sup> was reached in 1933-34. The average number of workers in these plants was between 40 and 50, according to the city health department, and a peak employment of between 16,000 and 20,000 workers was probably reached during that year.

Under the contract system the working force in the industry was somewhat disorganized. The Mexicans looked upon pecan shelling as a last resort, and worked at it only when other work was not available. Often the pickers would leave a plant where the nuts were small or running heavily to shell, and go to other plants where the nuts were reported to be better. Women would come to work for a few hours while their children were in school, returning home to prepare lunch and dinner for their families. Old men and women, cripples, and even children worked in the shelling plants to earn enough to pay the rent or buy food. An NRA investigator found children

<sup>11</sup> *The Pecan Industry in Bexar County*, unpublished transcript, Hearing No. 4, Industrial Commission of Texas, San Antonio, February 14-15, 1938.

<sup>12</sup> *San Antonio Evening News*, San Antonio, Tex., July 18, 1934.

from 10 to 15 years of age at work in several San Antonio plants.<sup>13</sup>

Working conditions in the hand shelling plants were (and are) bad. Often as many as a hundred pickers sat at their stalls around long tables in a room perhaps 25 by 40 feet, wielding their picking knives with quick, deft movements. Illumination was poor. There was no ventilation, except for open doors or windows in warm weather, and the fine, brown dust from the pecans hung in the air. (Many pecan workers believe that this dust causes some of the tuberculosis that is so prevalent among the Mexicans, and some think that it is harmful to the eyes, but medical findings are not available on these points.)

In a majority of the shelling plants, particularly the smaller ones, sanitary facilities were completely lacking for many years. There were no inside flush toilets and no washbowls for the workers. (In October 1936 this was partly corrected when the city amended its health ordinance to require that all shelling plants have running water and sanitary facilities. In many plants, however, there was still only one toilet for a large number of workers of both sexes in 1938; and lighting and ventilation were still very poor.)

The number of contractors dropped to about 300 in 1935, but the number of workers at the peak season remained high. This was due partly to the large amount of shelling in this period, especially during the 1935-36 season, following the bumper crop of 1935. In 1936 two things happened to reduce further the number of contractors. First, there was a very small pecan crop that year; and second, contractors were required to improve working conditions and homework was outlawed by the health ordinance mentioned above.

After the passage of this ordinance many of the small establishments closed down. The maximum number of plants was 204 in 1936, and 191 in 1937, according to the San Antonio Department of Health, which issued health certificates to pecan workers. Early in January of 1938 health department records showed that over 12,000 workers were registered as employed in 110 different plants,<sup>14</sup> nearly all of which were operated by contractors.

#### Seasonality of Employment

Prior to the passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act pecan shelling was marked by wide seasonal variations in activity. A few of the larger companies operated throughout the year, but many of the small ones customarily closed down during the summer, operating only from October or November until some time in May. The peak

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<sup>13</sup> Lucas, John A., *Preliminary Report on the Pecan Shelling Industry*, unpublished ms., Research and Planning Division, National Recovery Administration, Washington, D. C., March 13, 1935, p. 31.

<sup>14</sup> *San Antonio Light*, San Antonio, Tex., January 6, 1938.

of employment came about the end of November, with the number of employees then remaining almost stationary until March. The low point of employment occurred in midsummer, when thousands of shellers had left San Antonio for the cotton and beet fields. The number of employees varied from a usual peak of 10,000 or more in the late fall to a minimum of a few hundred in August and early September of slack years, according to officials of the San Antonio Department of Health.

Seasonal agricultural work and other types of seasonal employment dovetailed to some extent with pecan shelling to furnish fairly regular employment for some of the Mexicans. But even when other work was found in the summer to supplement pecan shelling, the pecan workers often lost considerable time between jobs and during periods of layoff. Out of 1,160 workers in the families of the 512 pecan workers interviewed, only 15 percent had steady employment throughout 1938. Of the balance, 21 percent were unemployed for 150 days or more during the year. The modal length of unemployment among all workers was 60 to 89 days, which fact was accounted for mainly by the shutdown of most of the shelling plants from October to December. More than 7 out of every 10 workers were unemployed this length of time. (See appendix table 7.)

The plants operated more extensively in the summer of 1938 than was usually the case, so that increased unemployment after the shutdown was partly offset by steadier work in pecans earlier in the year. On the other hand, the figures given by the pecan workers probably underestimate the actual amount of unemployment, since few of the persons interviewed were able to remember all short periods during which they had been out of work, especially when such periods occurred several months to a year before the time of interview.

With the growth of mechanized shelling in 1939, the seasonal factor began to be less important in the industry. The higher degree of training among the workers and the larger investment in equipment made it desirable for the large operators to maintain a somewhat steadier labor force than had previously been necessary.

#### ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF THE INDUSTRY

The pecan industry was fairly well stabilized in the predepression period, when the Funsten and Duerler companies and one or two other large operators dominated the shelling field. Prices of pecans in the shell were high enough on the average to allow the growers a fair profit, and prices of pecan meats were such as to allow steady operation of the principal shelling plants.

After 1930, however, the situation changed. The growers suffered from depressed prices of pecans in the shell. According to the

Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the United States Department of Agriculture, during the period from 1923 to 1930 the average price of pecans to the grower never dropped below 15 cents; but from 1931 to 1938, the average grower's price rose above 10 cents per pound only twice, in 1934 and 1936, when the crops were short.

The growers also suffered from lack of organized marketing facilities. Most of them dumped their pecans on the market as soon as they were harvested. One or two attempts have been made to start marketing cooperatives so that the farmer could market his pecans at the most favorable times of the year, but the cooperatives have never been widely used.

In the shelling industry during the depression period prices of pecan meats dropped, wages of pecan workers were cut to almost unbelievably low levels, and hand-shelling plants flourished under the impetus of sharpened competition. Meanwhile, several of the older shelling companies, including the G. A. Duerler Co. and the Barnhart Mercantile Co. of St. Louis, went out of business.

#### Shelling Costs and Wage Levels

Although a few large shellers were able to make handsome profits, largely by speculative buying and selling, during the depression, persons connected with the industry are agreed that there has been in recent years a comparatively small margin of profit in the actual shelling operation.

In 1938 Julius Seligmann asserted that "not a man in the pecan business" at that time could "legitimately make a dime" out of shelling pecans.<sup>15</sup> His profits had been made in speculation, he said. Seligmann claimed to have been losing money on the shelling end of his business at the close of 1937 because of the low prices of shelled pecans. He gave the following breakdown of shelling costs per pound of meats in his plant:

Cost of nuts (at 6½ cents—37 percent meats)-----	\$0. 1755
Picking costs (at 5 cents and 6 cents—average 5½ cents)-----	. 0550
Cracking (at 50 cents per 100 pounds in shell)-----	. 0135
Contractor (averaging 50 cents per 100 pound in shell)-----	. 0135
Cleaning (at 50 cents per 100 pounds of meats)-----	. 0050
Shrinkage (2 percent of weight due to waste and drying)-----	. 0050
Grading-----	. 0075
Recleaning-----	. 0050
Average freight to United States market-----	. 0200
Discount and compensation to broker-----	. 0100
Overhead-----	. 0200
Social Security-----	. 0035
Storage, interest, and carrying charges-----	. 0050
<b>Total-----</b>	<b>. 3385</b>

<sup>15</sup> *The Pecan Industry in Bexar County, op. cit.*



Pecans were then selling at 31 cents for pieces and 32 to 34 cents for halves, Seligmann said.<sup>16</sup>

Profits, such as they were, were maintained at the expense of the workers in the industry during this period. A report by an NRA investigator on the wages of 1,030 employees of 14 San Antonio contractors showed average earnings during December 1934 of \$1.29 per week for 34.8 hours' work. Crackers, pickers, and cleaners, the three main types of workers, were earning averages of 8, 3, and 5 cents per hour, respectively, at the time.<sup>17</sup>

During 1933-34 some operators had actually paid as little as 2 and 3 cents per pound to pickers.<sup>18</sup> In 1934-35 wage rates in some shelling plants were increased to 5 and 6 cents. In 1935-36 the scale dropped again, to 3 and 4 cents. From 1936 to 1938 the 5- and 6-cent scale was generally prevalent.

Such mechanization as was introduced following the application of the wage-hour law did not at once lower the cost of production, since the accompanying fivefold increase in wages more than offset the savings effected by the use of machines. Early in 1939 Mr. Seligmann reported that the labor costs of shelling in his mechanized plants operating under the wage-hour law ranged from 10.64 cents per pound of meats for pecans from Wharton (in the soft-shell district) and 12.67 cents for those from Gonzales (near San Antonio) to 16.5 cents for hard-shelled pecans from central and west Texas. The best east Texas pecans, he said, cost 8 cents per pound for picking alone, while those from west Texas cost 14 cents for this operation. Overhead, grading, freight charges, shrinkage, etc., totaled an additional 5 cents per pound. Seligmann maintained that the best pecans were costing about 5 cents more per pound of meats than they had under the old hand system, and the poorest pecans about 12 cents more. The previous week, he said, the meats produced had cost 41.14 cents per pound, and were selling for only 39 cents.<sup>19</sup>

There is every reason to believe, however, that under ordinary conditions pecan prices will be more than high enough to meet the cost of production. Shelled pecans on the New York market during the depression years, 1932-1938, brought an average of 43 cents per pound for halves and 39 cents for pieces, according to United States Department of Agriculture estimates based on prices quoted by the *New York Journal of Commerce*. This was about the same as the

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Lucas, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>18</sup> This means 3 cents for halves and 2 cents for pieces. Since an average hand sheller could pick about a pound of meats per hour, about two-thirds of these being halves, wages were less than 3 cents per hour in some plants.

<sup>19</sup> These figures were furnished to the Division of Research, Work Projects Administration, by Julius Seligmann in January 1939.

cost of production cited by Mr. Seligmann in the first few weeks of mechanized operation in his plants.

Furthermore, the experience of the R. E. Funsten Co. of St. Louis shows that mechanized shelling is profitable on a large scale. During the depression, instead of abandoning mechanization as did the San Antonio operators, the Funsten Co. increased the degree of mechanization in its plants, replacing 1,600 workers with 230 highly efficient girls at wages higher than the 25-cent minimum later set by the wage-hour law.<sup>20</sup>

#### Competition From Other Species of Nuts

One disturbing factor in the pecan market in recent years has been the increasingly sharp competition from domestic and foreign nuts. The English walnut is the greatest competitor of the pecan among domestically produced nuts. It is more easily shelled than the pecan, and in 1937-38 walnut meats sold at an average wholesale price of 37 cents per pound, compared with 40 and 36 cents for pecan halves and pieces in 1938, according to the United States Department of Agriculture. The per capita consumption of walnut meats in the United States in the year 1937-38 was 0.38 pounds, compared with 0.22 pounds for pecans.

Among foreign competitors of the domestic pecan, imported pecans are relatively unimportant. Up until 1934 some Mexican pecans were shipped in at low prices, but since that time the low prices of domestic pecans and a rise in the tariff rate on pecans from 6 to 10 cents have stopped nearly all importations.

The most important foreign competitor of the pecan is the Indian cashew nut. The quantity of cashew nuts imported grew from less than 100,000 pounds in 1923 to approximately 14,900,000 pounds in 1934 and to more than 26,000,000 pounds in 1937-38. The average wholesale price of (shelled) cashews in the season of 1937-38 was 20 cents per pound, or about half the price of shelled pecans.<sup>21</sup> The per capita consumption of cashews in the same year, approximately 0.20 pounds, was almost equal to that of pecans.

Brazil nuts also furnish considerable competition for domestic nuts, the quantity imported approximating 12,700,000 pounds of meats in 1937-38, or 0.10 pounds per capita. The average wholesale price of shelled Brazil nuts in 1937-38 was 30 cents, or considerably less than the price of shelled pecans. (See appendix table 8.)

Shelling operators are unanimous in their desire that a higher

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<sup>20</sup> Lucas, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Unpublished data furnished by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

tariff be placed on foreign nuts such as cashews and Brazil nuts. However, more efficient methods of shelling, combined with advertising and more attractive packaging of pecans, would probably enable the pecan industry at least to hold its own in the domestic market.

#### RECENT ATTEMPTS TO STABILIZE THE PECAN INDUSTRY

Three attempts have been made to establish a higher level of wages and stable conditions in the pecan-shelling industry in the last few years, two by the Federal Government and one by organized labor.

The first move in this direction was made by the National Recovery Administration in 1933-34. There followed several attempts at unionization, culminating in a strike and resultant union contracts in 1938. Finally the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 was passed, bringing drastic changes to the industry.

##### The National Recovery Administration

The attempt by the NRA to stabilize the pecan-shelling industry and to raise wages failed in 1934 because of disagreement between the Northern shellers, headed by the R. E. Funsten Co., and the Southern shellers, headed by Julius Seligmann's Southern Pecan Shelling Co.

In August 1933, soon after the passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act, the National Pecan Shellers' Association was formed by 90 percent of the shelling industry. A confidential agreement was drawn up, giving an NRA code committee authority to increase wages to \$6.50, or if necessary to a maximum of \$12 a week. This agreement was signed by representatives of practically the entire industry, including Joe Freeman, then president of the Southern Pecan Shelling Co., and Frank Springer, another large San Antonio sheller. A code was then drawn up by the code committee for approval, providing a minimum wage of \$11 per week for men and \$7 for women.

Julius Seligmann withdrew from the National Pecan Shellers' Association shortly after this and started the Southwestern Pecan Shellers' Association in opposition to the former group. Other San Antonio shellers followed his lead; Frank Springer became the secretary of the Southwestern association. The new body proposed a separate code for the South, specifying a \$7.50 weekly minimum for men and one of \$5.60 for women. Later the Southern shellers were unwilling to pay even this much.

On August 7, 1934, NRA Deputy Administrator George Carlson met with the code committee of the National Pecan Shellers' Association in Chicago in an effort to reach an amicable agreement. Carlson

later reported that the conference was a stormy session.<sup>22</sup> The code finally approved by the NRA provided for a minimum wage of 16½ cents an hour or \$6.60 a week in the North, and 15 cents an hour or \$6 a week in the South. This was a wage differential of 10 percent rather than the larger margin which was demanded by the Southwestern association. The code became effective on October 29, 1934, but a code authority was never selected. Only one San Antonio sheller signed the code—the G. A. Duerler Co., which shortly afterward closed its doors.

Immediately after the code was approved, Julius Seligmann caused a bill in equity to be filed in the United States District Court in San Antonio, charging that the code was “unreasonable, capricious, arbitrary, and confiscatory.” It was claimed that the code had been induced by a minority of the industry “in an effort to obtain an unfair advantage over the dealers and shellers in the Southern area.” Frank Springer stated that the code would destroy the industry in the Southwest. The court took no action on the injunction, but recommended an investigation of the industry.

During the 7 months that the NRA code was officially in force, it was actually almost completely ineffective. The principal reason for its failure, according to an official NRA report, was that adherence to the code was voluntary, enabling dissenters to nullify its effect. The report also pointed out that until the contracting system and home shelling of pecans at low piecework rates were done away with, little could be done to raise the wage standards in the industry.<sup>23</sup>

#### Unionization of the Pecan Shellers

Trade-unionism has appealed increasingly to the Mexicans of San Antonio in recent years. Several hundred Mexicans have become members of such A. F. of L. unions as the common laborers, the musicians, the building service employees, and other groups. Approximately 1,400 San Antonio women, 80 percent of whom were Mexicans, belonged to the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union in 1939. The most far-reaching movement to unionize the Mexicans, however, has been in the field of pecan shelling.

The first important attempt to organize the pecan shellers resulted in the Pecan Shelling Workers' Union of San Antonio, an independent local union organized in 1933. It was led by Magdaleno Rodriguez, who supported the shelling operators in the fight against the NRA. Julius Seligmann has stated that he helped Rodriguez financially, in order to prevent small operators from undercutting the piecework

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<sup>22</sup> Unpublished data on the pecan-shelling industry in NRA files, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

scale paid by the larger companies. Rodriguez ran his union virtually as a one-man affair, and his leadership was accepted by most of the Mexican workers since there was no other union available. He claimed 10,000 to 12,000 members in 1934-35, but a much smaller number than this actually paid dues.

The Rodriguez union gradually lost its strength and disappeared from the local scene. The remnants of this union reappeared in 1937 as the Texas Pecan Shelling Workers' Union, with Albert Gonsen as secretary.

Late in November 1937 a representative of the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (usually called the "Ucapawa") visited San Antonio in an effort to enlist the pecan workers in the CIO.<sup>24</sup> A temporary charter was issued to Gonsen's Texas Pecan Shelling Workers' Union, with the understanding that it would be expanded to include other groups.

On January 31, 1938, the Southern Pecan Shelling Co.'s contractors announced that they would have to lower the pickers' wages from the 6 and 7 cents per pound which they had been paying for several months to the former scale of 5 and 6 cents. A spontaneous walkout followed. The Gonsen faction of the CIO Pecan Workers' Union, Local 172, held back, but the strike spread rapidly. The Ucapawa then threw its support behind the strikers, recognizing the leadership of an insurgent group which opposed Gonsen's policies.

From the beginning the union faced the opposition of the city authorities. On February 7 the police routed 300 pickets from the shelling plants. Over 1,000 pickets were arrested during the strike on charges of "blocking the sidewalks," "disturbing the peace," and "congregating in unlawful assemblies." Tear gas was used on 6 or 8 occasions during the first 2 weeks of the strike, according to the testimony of Chief of Police Owen Kilday at the hearings of the Texas Industrial Commission on February 14; 52 policemen and 125 firemen were used on "riot duty" in the strike. Both Mayor C. K. Quin and Kilday maintained that there was no strike, since they said that only a minority of workers had left the plants.<sup>25</sup>

When a national officer of the Ucapawa arrived in San Antonio to take charge of the strike, he and his assistants were given police "bodyguards." Chief Kilday made the following statement: "He is an intruder down here that hasn't 600 or 700 followers in the pecan industry. You call it a strike; I call it a disturbance out of Washington, D. C."<sup>26</sup>

In spite of opposition, however, about half of the workers in the

<sup>24</sup> *San Antonio Light*, San Antonio, Tex., November 21, 1937.

<sup>25</sup> *The Pecan Industry in Bexar County*, op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

industry were out on strike by the middle of February. More than 6,000 persons applied for membership in the union, out of approximately 12,000 pecan shellers, and about 3,000 of these paid dues during the strike period, according to George Lambert, representative of the Ucapawa in San Antonio in 1938.

Meanwhile, the treatment of the strikers by the police had attracted so much attention that Governor Allred ordered the Industrial Commission of Texas to investigate the situation, particularly with regard to civil liberties. On February 14, 1938, Chairman Everett Looney of this body called a public hearing in San Antonio.

Several ministers, members of a committee appointed by the San Antonio Ministerial Association to investigate the strike, testified that the wages paid to pecan workers averaged \$2.50 per week, and that the pickets had behaved peacefully, although the police had taken their picket signs away from them. Several newspapermen also reported that the strikers were quite peaceable.<sup>27</sup>

A few days after the hearings were concluded the union petitioned for an injunction to restrain the police from interfering with peaceful picketing. Kilday testified at the injunction hearing, "I did not interfere with the strike. I interfered with a revolution."<sup>28</sup> The injunction was refused.

In order to resolve the deadlock, Governor Allred persuaded Julius Seligmann, the principal employer involved, and the union to arbitrate the dispute. On March 8 the strikers agreed to return to work at the reduced wage which had led to the strike, pending the determining of a fair wage scale by the arbitration board.

After an audit of company books to determine the ability of the operators to pay the scale demanded by the union, a decision was handed down by the arbitrators to the effect that there should be a compromise between the 6- and 7-cent rate demanded by the union and the 5- and 6-cent rate asked by the operators. The new rate was to be 5½ and 6½ cents after June 1. On this basis the union negotiated with the large operators closed-shop contracts, which were to run until November 1, 1938.

The union's first contracts with the operators expired after the industry had closed down, but the union started negotiations for new contracts. Within a little over a month it had signed 13 contracts covering plants that normally would have employed some 8,000 workers. The most important of these contracts was with the Southern Pecan Shelling Co.

The union contracts called for a closed shop, a checkoff system

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *San Antonio Light*, San Antonio, Tex., February 26, 1938.

of collecting union dues, grievance representatives in each shop, and wages for pickers of 7 and 8 cents per pound and for crackers of 60 cents per 100 pounds. These wages were to apply only in case the industry should obtain an exemption from the minimum-wage rate set by the Fair Labor Standards Act. The union agreed to cooperate with the employers in trying to obtain a tariff on foreign nuts, and promised to begin organizing pecan shellers in other places in order to establish a uniform wage level and uniform conditions of work throughout the industry.

#### **The Fair Labor Standards Act**

On October 24, 1938, the Fair Labor Standards Act became effective. The San Antonio shelling plant operators had opposed the wage-hour bill, and when it was passed did not believe that it applied to them because it excluded "agricultural labor." They maintained that pecan shelling was the processing of an agricultural product and that San Antonio and indeed all of Texas were within the "area of production for pecans" and therefore exempt from the provisions of the law. The Wage and Hour Division of the U. S. Department of Labor defined "area of production" as the handling of products on the farms where they are grown, however. The shutdown of October 24 was in part, at least, a dramatic protest against the application of the Wage-Hour Act to the shelling industry. By working at an unusually high level during the summer of 1938 the operators had stored up a considerable number of shelled nuts, so that the shutdown had little immediate effect except on the workers who were laid off.

Early in December the Southern Pecan Shelling Co. and the CIO union jointly applied for a temporary exemption from the provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act. The petition requested that a minimum wage of 15 cents an hour be set for a "learning period" of 3 months, during which time Seligmann proposed to "train" between 2,500 and 3,000 workers as operators of machinery which he would install.

The action of the union in joining Seligmann was apparently due to: (1) a prevalent opinion in the union that a wage of 25 cents an hour was so high that if it were immediately made applicable the industry would not reopen, at least for several months while machinery was being installed; and (2) the union's relief at the temporary cessation of a year's battle with the Southern Pecan Shelling Co., and willingness to cooperate with it in the hope that the union members could get back to work. The union made clear that it supported the Fair Labor Standards Act unconditionally, and would ask that the minimum wage be enforced if an investigation by the Wage and Hour Division did not indicate a need for a "learners' period."

A hearing by the Wage and Hour Division on the petition for an exemption opened on December 19, 1938, in San Antonio. The principal questions to be decided were whether additional skilled workers were needed in the shelling industry, and if so, whether a refusal to grant an exemption for learners would curtail employment.

In addition to the testimony of Seligmann and other operators advocating a learners' exemption, H. A. Wittliff, a representative of the Champion Pecan Machine Co., said that at least 10 weeks would be required to install the necessary machinery and to train workers, especially technicians. George Lambert and Santos Vasquez, representing the Pecan Workers' Union, maintained that certain new skills must be learned and adjustments made. Several Mexican shellers placed on the stand estimated, however, that for an experienced picker to learn the new skills would require only a period ranging from "a few days" to "more than 2 weeks."

Those who testified against the granting of an exemption included Eugene Funsten of the R. E. Funsten Co. of St. Louis; Frank Coari of Chicago; and J. W. Woldert of Tyler, Tex., all of whom were already paying the 25-cent minimum wage in their mechanized plants. They maintained that no learning period was required for shellers who had previously done hand shelling. A special industrial consultant employed by the Wage and Hour Division, Francis Goodell, corroborated their testimony, saying that essentially the same skills were required of pickers in a mechanized plant as had been developed in hand shelling. He stated his belief that at least two to three thousand skilled pickers were available in San Antonio.

On January 19, 1939, the Wage and Hour Division denied the request for an exemption, stating that "The conditions prevailing in this part of the industry are precisely those which Congress stated \* \* \* were to be eliminated by the Fair Labor Standards Act."<sup>29</sup> The decision pointed out that the public, through private charity, relief, and WPA, has footed a part of the labor cost in the industry, although "the industry has not been depressed or unable to meet its social or economic responsibility to the community." Further, that "the applicant can employ experienced pecan shellers in sufficient number to meet its labor requirements, and that employment opportunities will not be curtailed by denying the application to employ learners." And finally, that:

It is clear that Mr. Seligmann's company is making this application because a 90-day period will be required to train technical and management personnel, to install machinery, and to get production fully under way, not because he has any

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<sup>29</sup> *Findings and Determinations of the Presiding Officer, January 19, 1939*, Release No. R-159, Wage and Hour Division, U. S. Department of Labor, Washington, D. C., January 23, 1939, pp. 20-22.





*Texas Work Projects Administration.*

*The Recleaning Process in a Modern Mechanized Plant.*

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evidence that it takes 90 days to train a worker. Thus, in a real sense, the worker would pay in substandard wages for a part of the cost of training management and mechanizing the factory. \* \* \* It would make pecan pickers take a pay cut to compensate management while it is putting itself through a learner period.

One serious problem in enforcing the Fair Labor Standards Act was the question of home shelling. At the wage-hour hearings in San Antonio, J. R. Fleming of Weatherford, Tex., testified that he sold pecans in the shell to townspeople and farmers in and near Weatherford, later buying back the meats. He denied that he was violating the spirit or the letter of the Fair Labor Standards Act, since he sold the pecans and bought the meats back again "at the market price." Thus, he said, the homeworkers got a "profit" rather than a wage. Pecans in the shell were often taken out on credit, and a cash balance was paid to the shellers when they brought the meats back to him, said Fleming.

George Lambert, the union representative, charged that the homeworkers received only "2 or 3 cents a pound" for shelling pecans. He also pointed out that home shellers do not have to pay Social Security taxes, and that they have no overhead expenses such as rent, heat, lights, or sanitary equipment other than those of their own living quarters. Home shelling of the type described in Weatherford was being done on an increasingly large scale in many parts of the State early in 1939, according to Lambert.

A second type of evasion began when a few hand plants opened up soon after the initial shutdown in October 1938. These plants claimed that they were engaged only in trade within the State of Texas ("intra-state commerce") and that therefore the law did not apply to them. The number of these plants increased rapidly in the first half of 1939, and it became obvious that only a small part of their products were being consumed within the State.

Mechanization, which started on an experimental scale in November 1938, made considerable headway in San Antonio during the winter. The modernized process entailed: soaking the nuts in water to soften the shells and make the meats less brittle before cracking; the use of mechanical graders to sort the nuts into sizes; mechanical crackers and shakers to break the shells and separate them as completely as possible from the meats; comfortable and well-lighted work tables and moving belts where the pickers finished the process of extracting the meats and removed bad kernels and bits of foreign matter; a process of sterilizing and drying the meats to prevent mold; and mechanical sorting of the meats according to sizes before packing them into barrels, boxes, or fancy containers for shipment.

In March 1939 the Southern Pecan Shelling Co. was employing approximately 1,800 workers in its 3 large mechanized establishments,

all under the provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act. A few hundred persons were also at work in hand-shelling plants claiming to be engaged in "intrastate commerce," most of these being covered by union contracts calling for a minimum wage for pickers of 7 and 8 cents per pound pending the application of the wage-hour law.

By June 1939, however, the number of employees in plants operating with the 25-cent minimum wage in San Antonio had dropped to about 800. Practically all of these were in the Southern Pecan Shelling Co.'s plants. This might have been considered merely a seasonal drop except for two things: employment in the hand-shelling plants both in San Antonio and elsewhere was increasing during the same period; and Julius Seligmann had stated that seasonality would not prevail in his plants once the process had been mechanized.

Another 800 San Antonio workers were employed in 2 small mechanized plants and in 15 or 20 small hand-shelling plants which were not observing the provisions of the Wage-Hour Act. The union was pressing for enforcement of the act, but no case had yet been brought.

Some of the hand-shelling plants which had started up under agreement with the union had meanwhile dropped their pickers' wages to 5 and 6 cents per pound. At least one employer claimed immunity from the wage-hour law on the grounds that he rented seats in his plant to the workers, sold them pecans in the morning, and bought back pecan meats in the afternoon. Outside of San Antonio, home shelling was increasing in spite of the wage-hour law.

As a result of these forms of competition, pecan meats were selling for as little as 32 cents per pound in Houston in the spring of 1939, and wage standards in a large section of the industry were dropping to levels as low as those which prevailed before the Fair Labor Standards Act went into effect.

Unless strict enforcement is achieved by the Wage and Hour Division, wage standards in the industry will continue to be undermined. Ultimately machinery will undoubtedly be developed which will be much more economical than hand labor; but in the meantime the cheapness of handwork, particularly in the homes of poverty-stricken farmers and townspeople, will provide an incentive for the continued violation of the act.

The shelling industry is thus in a state of transition at present. It seems certain, however, that if further mechanization and reorganization of the industry occurs, the production per worker will be even higher than it is now in the mechanized plants, and the cost of production per pound will be as low as under the old handwork system. This will mean that, although fewer workers will be employed in shelling pecans, those who are working should be able to earn wages several times as high as was possible under the old system.

## Chapter II

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### *EARNINGS OF THE PECAN SHELLERS IN 1938*

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**T**HE PROBLEM of low wages and unemployment among the Mexican pecan shellers of San Antonio has its roots in conditions which prevailed over a period of many years before the shutdown of the shelling industry in October 1938. Even prior to the depression the Mexicans, brought into this country primarily to do low-paid agricultural work, were usually paid not more than \$1 per day. When unemployment began to increase from 1930 on, the Mexicans, being for the most part unskilled workers, were among the first to lose such employment as they had in the more desirable lines of work. They were then forced to rely on pecan shelling, agricultural labor, and other unskilled, menial types of work for whatever wages they could get—often as little as 5 cents an hour. Many were unable to find any work whatsoever during a large part of each year.

The 512 Mexican pecan shellers who were interviewed in the present study did piecework in the pecan industry during a great part of the year, supplementing the wages thus received by casual employment in agricultural labor or miscellaneous work or by public assistance. Pecan work predominated, with 60 percent reporting that they had been employed longer in pecan shelling than in any other industry during 1938. An additional 16 percent reported agricultural work as the occupation in which they had worked longest, and the balance worked mainly at unskilled labor in manufacturing and other industries. But all had done some pecan-shelling work during 1938.

Most of the shellers were employed during 9 months or more of the year. Yet, in spite of fairly regular employment, extreme privation followed on the heels of the shutdown of the pecan industry late in 1938.

The primary reason for the great amount of distress among the pecan shellers was the low wage structure which prevailed in the pecan-shelling industry. Paid on a piecework basis at rates ranging from 5 to 8 cents per pound for the pecan meats, the average "picker"

was able in 1938 to earn only \$2.59 for a full week's work in the overcrowded and unmechanized plants. A few of the younger men were able to earn about twice this amount for cracking pecans at a rate of 50 to 60 cents per 100 pounds, but only a small minority were thus fortunate. Other types of work open to the Mexicans were paid on a similarly low scale.

The case of Juan Flores shows what these conditions mean to the average Mexican family:

Juan Flores came to San Antonio in 1918. He never had work other than odd jobs paying \$2 or \$3 a week until 1923-1925, when he worked for 2 years at the local water works, earning \$2 per day for "pick and shovel work." From 1925 on he and his family spent part of each year in the cotton fields. When crops were good the family usually ended the cotton season with \$50 to \$60 in cash to last them through the winter. When WPA was started, Juan was assigned to a job paying \$35 per month. Lack of citizenship caused his termination. Late in 1936 he began working in the pecan plants, where he never earned more than \$2.50 to \$2.75 per week. His wife also worked in the shelling plants when she could get away from the children. The family's total income was only about \$240 in 1938, so that when the plants shut down the family was dependent on Federal surplus commodities and an occasional loaf of bread obtained from the Salvation Army. Within a month the family was threatened with eviction, because they were already behind with the \$4-a-month rent which they paid for their three-room shack

#### TOTAL FAMILY INCOMES IN 1938

The extreme poverty of the Mexican pecan shellers may be gauged by the fact that the average (median) income for the year 1938 among the 512 families interviewed was only \$251. These families averaged 4.6 persons. The \$251 included all income—payment in kind as well as in cash, wages from work relief, and the value of surplus commodities and other relief contributions.

It may be asserted that 1938 was an unusually depressed year because of the economic recession, the February strike, and the October shutdown. But a supplementary question as to the families' 1937 incomes revealed an average in that year of only \$286 per family, or \$35 more than the average 1938 income. The error was undoubtedly greater in the 1937 income than in the 1938 figure, especially since the former sum was not broken down and checked in detail by the interviewers; nevertheless, the figures are so similar as to suggest that 1938 was a fairly representative year for the pecan shellers.

It should be remembered that the average is only the middle point in the scale; half of the families had less than \$251 in 1938. About 5 percent of the shellers' families received less than \$100 during the entire year, and another 30 percent received from \$100 to \$200. Only 16 percent of the families received \$500 or more, and only 2 percent

\$900 or more in 1938. (See appendix table 9.) When pecan shelling was the *only* source of earned income, as it was in the case of 41 per cent of the families, average income was even lower—\$192 per family for the year.

The significance of these meager incomes in terms of purchasing power is clear. The typical pecan-shelling family, with an income of only \$251, received on the average only 69 cents per day in 1938. This was the sum available for food, clothing, shelter, and incidentals for families averaging 4.6 persons. This meant that only 15 cents could be spent for each person in the family each day. Incomes on this extremely low level can result only in suffering, malnutrition, disease, and high death rates.

A brief inspection of the earnings of members of pecan-shelling families in the principal occupations in which they found jobs<sup>1</sup> will cast further light on their total incomes in 1938.

#### Pecan Work

Although a major portion of the incomes of the 512 families was derived from pecans, the wages paid for piecework in this industry have been far below what is required even for bare subsistence. Here is a typical case:

Anastacio Medina, for 40 years a resident of San Antonio, has worked in pecans "off and on" since 1905. He dislikes the work, but feels that it is "better than starvation." Since 1923 he has shelled pecans each year from October until the middle of July, when the cotton-picking season opens in the Corpus Christi area. His wife and their 18-year-old daughter also worked in the shelling plants, but altogether they could earn only about \$6 a week. In 1938, 5 months of work in pecans netted the family only about \$100. They also had an income of about \$70 from cotton work and a few dollars from odd jobs, or just under \$200 in all for the year 1938. The family was able to get along without relief during most of the year, but only by drastic reductions in expenditures for food. The Medinas were living in a shack which was once a

<sup>1</sup> A "job" in this study refers to continuous family employment in one locality at one type of work, regardless of the number of employers involved. This broad definition is especially necessary because of the casual nature of employment in the pecan-shelling industry in 1938 and earlier; during the shelling season one worker often changed employers several times, seeking advantageous shelling conditions and higher earnings. Thus, a family, one or more of whose workers shelled pecans during a continuous period during the winter and spring, picked cotton during the summer, and returned to steady pecan work in the fall, would be listed as having two jobs in the pecan industry, regardless of the number of workers or employers involved. Under this definition, the 512 pecan-shelling families covered by this study held 1,164 jobs in 1938, of which 684 were in the pecan industry. See Webb, John N., *The Migratory Casual Worker*, Research Monograph VII, Division of Social Research, Works Progress Administration, Washington, D. C., 1937, p. 53, for discussion of similar definition of "job."

garage, with a dirt floor soaked with oil, holes in the walls and roof, and only a springless bed, a cot, a rusty stove, and a trunk for furniture. This was better than their previous home, however, for that was an abandoned chicken coop which a friend let them have rent free during the strike of 1938. For their current place of residence the Medinas paid \$2.50 a month. They were \$1.50 behind in their rent at the time of the shutdown, so they expected to be evicted at any time. The union soup kitchen and the church relief depot had kept them in food since the plants closed.

Of the 1,164 jobs reported by pecan shellers' families in 1938, 59 percent were in pecan shelling, compared with only 14 percent in agriculture, the next most frequent type of work. Average individual incomes from all pecan-shelling jobs amounted to only \$2.73 per week in 1938. To earn this sum, the shellers worked 51 hours per week on the average. (See appendix table 10.) Hours were very irregular; some shellers reported having worked from 5 a. m. to 10 p. m. during rush periods, while at other times some of the plants were closed entirely or in operation only 3 or 4 days per week. There was also considerable variation in incomes under the piece-work system which prevailed. On about 4 percent of the jobs in the industry, the individual shellers averaged less than \$1.40 per week, while on 13 percent of the jobs the workers were able to earn \$4.20 or more per week. Less than 2 percent of the jobs paid individual workers an average of \$7 or more per week, however.

Of the 680 jobs in the shelling industry, 89 percent consisted of picking pecans—separating the meats from the shells. Most of the others, 9 percent of all, were in cracking the nuts. The minority of the younger men who were crackers were the better paid of the two groups, with average earnings of \$4.48 per week, compared with \$2.59 earned by pickers. The crackers worked an average of 53 hours per week, compared with 51 hours for the pickers.

#### **Migratory Agricultural Work**

Considering the extremely low wages paid in the pecan industry, it is not surprising that many pecan shellers' families found it necessary to supplement their earnings by following the crops during the summer and early fall. Of the 512 families interviewed, 118, or 23 percent, had followed the crops in 1938. About a quarter of these went north to work in the sugar-beet fields in Michigan, Minnesota, or neighboring States. Most of the migratory pecan shellers worked in the cotton fields of south, central, and west Texas, however, where Mexicans have a virtual monopoly on cotton-picking jobs.

An investigation by the Texas Farm Placement Service in 1937 revealed that approximately 85 percent of the State's migratory workers were Mexicans; <sup>2</sup> of the remaining 15 percent, two-thirds were

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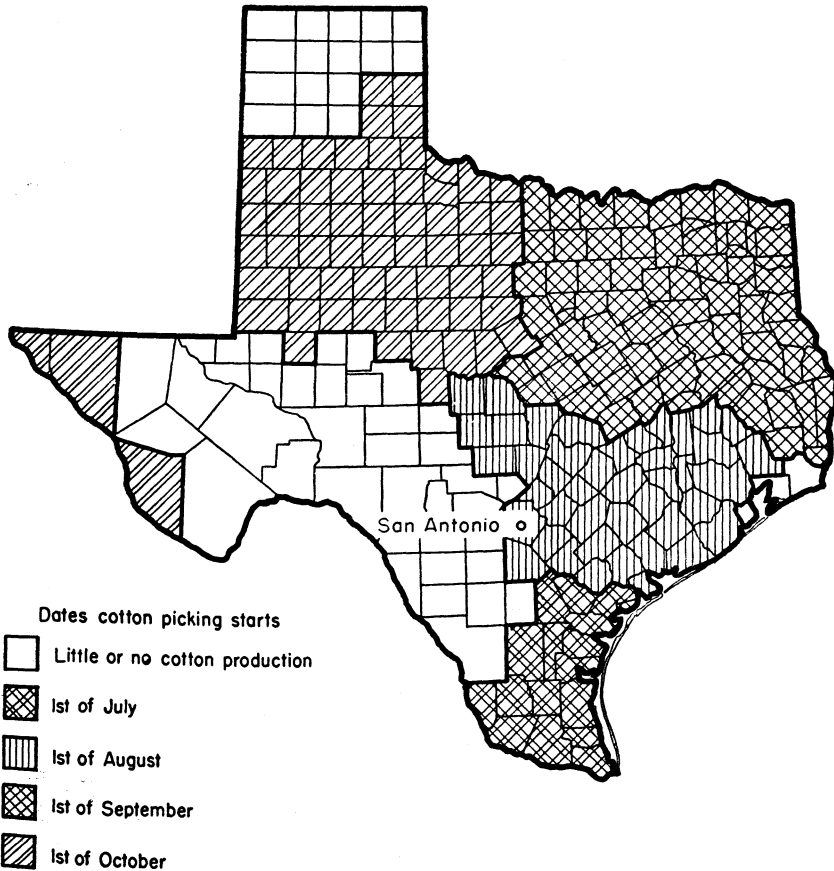
<sup>2</sup> Farm Placement Service, *Survey of Farm Placement in Texas, 1936 and 1937*, Texas State Employment, Austin, Tex., 1938, p. 82.



white and one-third Negro. Negro labor is used mainly in eastern Texas, near the Louisiana border, and white workers from Oklahoma and neighboring States compete with the Mexicans for jobs in northern Texas. Nearly all the seasonal agricultural work in central and south Texas, and most of that in west Texas, however, is done by Mexican labor.

A few of the Mexicans who combined pecan shelling with cotton work started chopping cotton near Brownsville and Corpus Christi

FIG. 2 — COTTON-PICKING SEASONS IN TEXAS



Source: Adapted from map appearing in *Survey of Farm Placement in Texas, 1936 and 1937*, Farm Placement Service, Texas State Employment Service, Austin, Tex., 1938 (appendix).

in May of 1938; but a majority waited until July or August and started with the cotton picking in south or central Texas. Most of the families doing migratory work remained in one general locality for the season. Only 18 percent reported two or more different jobs<sup>3</sup> in migratory types of work during 1938. Some of these families worked northward and westward from south Texas over various routes to the Panhandle and El Paso districts, where the cotton-picking season ended in November and December. Less than 4 percent of the cotton pickers went outside the State of Texas to find jobs.

In 1938 most cotton pickers were paid 40 cents per 100 pounds in the lower Rio Grande Valley, and 50 cents farther north. This was less than the wage paid to Negro cotton pickers in many parts of the South. Since a good worker in the Texas cotton fields can usually pick only about 150 pounds per day, the participation of several members of the family was required if earnings were to average more than a dollar per day for the season. The following case, representing one of the less fortunate families which worked in the 1938 crop, shows how difficult it is for the Mexicans to support themselves by picking cotton:

Manuel Juarez, a widower, has six children living at home. In May 1938 he left his pecan-shelling job, took the younger children out of school, and went in his 1926 Model T Ford to the cotton fields near Corpus Christi, where the crop was rumored to be good. However, thousands of other Mexican families had also heard the same rumor, which was an exaggeration; and in 45 days the five members of the family who worked (ranging upward from Juanita, 10) got in only 3 days of work and earned only \$10. In mid-July they left for Lamesa, in west Texas. It took them 8 days to cover the 650 miles, and when they arrived they found that the crop was no better than the one at Corpus Christi. They stayed at Lamesa for 65 days, but earned only \$18. Some of the other families with whom they were traveling were more fortunate, and by pooling their resources the several families were able to get enough to eat. In October Manuel borrowed money for gasoline to get home on, but ran out of both gasoline and money about 15 miles from San Antonio. Hitchhiking into the city, he persuaded a friend with an automobile to tow him in. He sold the car for \$5 cash and a \$5 grocery order, and rented a two-room shack for his family of seven for 50 cents a week. Before he could get back to work at shelling pecans, however, the plants were closed down, and Manuel was forced to apply for surplus commodities.

Of the 118 pecan workers' families who did some migratory labor, 69 percent worked in cotton, 19 percent in beets, and 12 percent in both. Thus, 81 percent of the migratory families had some work in cotton, and 31 percent had one or more members working in beets during part of the year.

Earnings in agricultural work, low as they were, topped the wages

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 1, p. 25.

earned in pecan work. Cotton workers earned an average of \$3.22 per week, compared with the \$2.73 earned by pecan shellers.<sup>4</sup> Working hours in the cotton fields, averaging 60 per week, were longer than in pecan work.

Beet workers were the aristocracy among the Mexican farm laborers, earning an average of \$4.90 per person per week.<sup>5</sup> Average family earnings per job in beet work amounted to \$260, compared with only \$69 per job in cotton work. This is partly explained by the fact that the average beet job lasted 189 days, compared with only 63 days for the average cotton job. Working hours in the beet fields, averaging 64 per week, were also longer than in cotton.

As a result of these low wages, in 1938 average earnings from all migratory work, including both cotton and beets, amounted to only \$92 per family for the entire season. And it was necessary for several members of migratory families to work in cotton or beets, whenever jobs were available, in order to earn even as much as this.

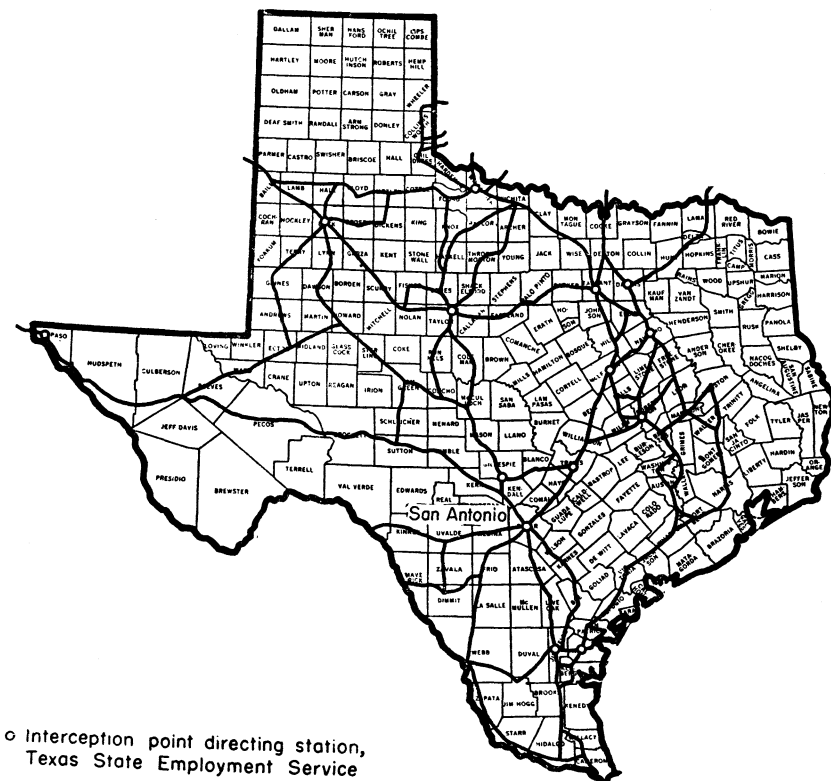
Low earnings from agricultural labor also help to explain the poverty of the pecan shellers as a group. A majority of the workers who went out to the cotton fields in 1938 returned to pecan work in the fall without funds or with very little with which to supplement their income from pecan shelling during the winter. Beet workers were a little more fortunate than cotton pickers, but few of them were able to accumulate as much as \$200 during the beet season.

It may be pointed out that 1938 was an unusually bad year for the agricultural workers, particularly in cotton, where reduced acreage and a short crop made picking conditions poor. It is also true,

<sup>4</sup>Wages of cotton pickers have dropped in recent years. A study of agricultural labor in Karnes County, which is located between San Antonio and Corpus Christi, showed that Mexicans comprised about 85 percent of the cotton workers in 1936. The average family income of these Mexicans for the year September 1935 to August 1936 was \$168, compared with \$183 for other whites and \$206 for Negroes. Most of the operators reported that they were paying cotton pickers 75 cents per 100 pounds that year, and that the average wage per day for all workers was \$1.09. See Vasey, Tom and Folsom, Josiah C., *Survey of Agricultural Labor Conditions, Karnes County, Texas*, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Agricultural Economics and Farm Security Administration, Washington, D. C., November 1937, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup>The average number of acres "thinned" per beet worker in the country in 1935 was 7.9, with the figure rising to 12.6 acres in southern Michigan, where many San Antonio families go. In southern Michigan and Ohio the workers were paid \$19 per acre in 1935 and \$18 in 1937. A U. S. Children's Bureau survey in 1935 showed that the median family earnings of 377 families who worked in the beet fields in Wyoming, Montana, Minnesota, and Michigan were \$340. The same survey showed that 63 percent of the families received relief at some time within a year from the close of the 1935 season. See Johnson, Elizabeth S., "Wages, Employment Conditions, and Welfare of Sugar Beet Laborers," *Monthly Labor Review*, Vol. 46, February 1938, pp. 322-333.

FIG 3 — PRINCIPAL MIGRATORY LABOR ROUTES IN TEXAS



Source. Adapted from map appearing in *Survey of Farm Placement in Texas, 1936 and 1937*, Farm Placement Service, Texas State Employment Service, Austin, Tex., 1938 (appendix).

AF-3018, WPA

however, that mechanized farming in both cotton and beets, and a continued trend toward reduction of cotton acreage, will tend to reduce future opportunities for agricultural workers to a low level even in normal crop years.

#### Miscellaneous Work

The better paid jobs in San Antonio are held for the most part by white Americans of European stock. Mexicans are usually found doing poorly paid unskilled or semiskilled types of work in which there is little opportunity for advancement, as the following summary of a Mexican worker's experience shows:

Pedro Gomez, 25, is the principal worker in a family of 10, which had a total income of \$510 in 1938. Pedro earned \$7 per week as handy man in a paper box factory during the entire year. In the fall, Pedro applied to the WPA for a job. Turned down because he already had a job, he offered to quit his work in the box factory to take a WPA job—to the dismay of the social worker who interviewed him. He could at least have learned cement finishing or stonemasonry on WPA, he said, while in private industry Mexicans are never advanced to better jobs, no matter how good they are. "I've been working in the factory for 3 years, and I work hard and never miss a minute," he said, "but I'm still getting the same pay and always will."

This attitude toward work relief on the part of the Mexicans is not surprising in view of the limited opportunities for Mexicans in private industry and the low wages they receive. In 1939, according to Mr. Howell Jones of the Trade Extension Department of the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, and others, the chief sources of industrial employment for Mexicans in San Antonio were the pecan-shelling industry; clothing factories (with about 4,000 employees under the homework, piecework system prior to the Fair Labor Standards Act, but less than 2,000 early in 1939); laundries (several hundred Mexican women composing almost the entire labor force); a large cigar factory (employing 300 to 500 Mexicans); and a large chili powder factory, 2 cement plants, and 3 or more meat packing houses (all of which employ some Mexican labor).

Some conception of the wages paid in recent years to the majority of Mexican laborers outside the pecan industry can be gained from the following estimates of wages of unskilled laborers in San Antonio made by a WPA official in 1938. Garment workers averaged \$3 to \$4 per week under the handwork system which was in use prior to the Fair Labor Standards Act. (Most of those who were still employed after the act became effective earned \$11 per week, provided they had full-time employment; but work is very irregular in many of the garment factories.) Part-time domestic servants earned \$2.50 per week plus carfare and lunches. Salesgirls earned about \$6 weekly. The few Mexicans who were fortunate enough to find jobs in the cement plants and packing houses and as unskilled laborers on construction work usually earned about 25 cents per hour. Gardeners earned only about \$2 per week, and proprietors of home laundries were fortunate if their net incomes were as much as \$3 per week.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Low wages and insecurity have been a normal state of affairs among the Mexicans of San Antonio for many years. A survey made in the early period of the depression indicated that the earnings of 1,500 Mexican families in San Antonio averaged between \$3.50 and \$3.75 per week. Even at that time one-quarter of the family heads interviewed were unemployed or irregularly employed. See Handman, Max S., "San Antonio," *Survey Graphic*, Vol. LXVI, No. 3, April 1931, p. 163.

Of the 512 families studied in the present survey 235, or 46 percent, had 1 or more members working at miscellaneous nonmigratory occupations (including WPA work) at some time during 1938. Approximately 27 percent of all jobs held by members of the pecan shellers' families were in these occupations. Unskilled industrial labor predominated, with 13 percent of all jobs falling in this group. Average earnings of unskilled workers were extremely low; industrial workers earned an average of \$3.64 for 39 hours' work a week, and servants, whose jobs made up 5 percent of all, averaged only \$2.24 for 46 hours' work a week. (See appendix table 10.)

It is typical of the low wages prevailing for Mexicans in private industry that in most lines of work earnings were less than the WPA minimum wage. Unskilled workers engaged in building and construction in private industry reported average earnings of \$6.02 per week, compared with \$8.54 per week earned by unskilled workers on WPA building and construction projects. Even more striking is the differential between unskilled laborers in miscellaneous industries. The 62 workers who were in private employment in this field reported average earnings of only \$1.82 per week, while the 22 on WPA earned an average of \$8.05 per week.

The only classes of jobs in private industry in which the Mexicans reported average earnings of more than \$7 per week were those consisting of semiskilled work in manufacturing, other than pecan shelling. In this type of work the average earnings on 53 jobs (5 percent of all) were \$7.14 for only 39 hours of work per week, or almost as much as was paid by the WPA.

In view of the low wages paid in private industry, as well as the generally depressed state of the labor market, it was quite natural that WPA jobs were considered desirable by the Mexicans.

#### COMPARISON OF INCOME SOURCES

Combining all jobs held by pecan-shelling families in 1938, it is found that average earnings were only \$3.01 for a 51-hour work week. Lowest on the wage scale were the domestic servants; they and the pecan workers were the only groups who earned less than the average. At the top of the scale were the miscellaneous semiskilled workers, with the beet workers in second place. Professional, business, and clerical workers were too few to allow conclusions to be drawn regarding their economic status, but their weekly incomes averaged little more than those of the pecan workers. (See appendix table 10.)

In terms of total family earnings in 1938, migratory workers were slightly better off than nonmigratory workers, although the cost of moving from place to place probably absorbed this difference in the case of cotton workers. The least prosperous group consisted of

those who did nothing except pecan work; those who combined pecan shelling with miscellaneous work in San Antonio were better off than those who combined pecan work and cotton picking, and were topped only by those who did both pecan shelling and beet work.

**Table 3.—Families of Pecan Shellers, by Income and Type of Work History, 1938**

Type of family work history	Number of families	Percent distribution	Average <sup>1</sup> annual income
Total.....	512	100	\$251
Nonmigratory.....	394	77	238
Pecan work only.....	210	41	192
Pecans and other.....	184	36	331
Migratory.....	118	23	285
Pecans and beets.....	22	4	445
Pecans and cotton.....	82	16	269
Pecans, beets, and cotton.....	14	3	268

<sup>1</sup> Median, based on 510 families; excludes 2 families whose total incomes in 1938 were not ascertainable.

An analysis of job duration and number of workers per job also shows wide variation according to type of work. The average job in semiskilled manufacturing work lasted 319 days, compared with an average of 242 days for pecan jobs and only 63 days for jobs in cotton. In beets and cotton the average number of workers per family job was 2.6, compared with 1.5 workers on pecan jobs and only 1 worker on other nonmigratory jobs. (See appendix table 11.)

#### Family Size and Number of Workers

Total incomes varied greatly with size of family,<sup>7</sup> since as a rule all able-bodied persons of 12 years or older in a family worked in the shelling plants or the fields whenever work was available. Total annual family incomes varied from an average of \$124 for single persons to \$637 for units of 10 or more persons.

**Table 4.—Families of Pecan Shellers, by Income and Size of Family, 1938**

Family size	Percent distribution of families	Average <sup>1</sup> annual income	Family size	Percent distribution of families	Average <sup>1</sup> annual income
Total families.....	100	\$251	5 persons.....	17	\$266
1 person.....	3	124	6 persons.....	11	341
2 persons.....	8	171	7 persons.....	9	318
3 persons.....	19	222	8 persons.....	6	337
4 persons.....	18	226	9 persons.....	3	387
			10 persons or more.....	6	637

<sup>1</sup> Median.

NOTE.—Based on 510 families; excludes 2 families whose total incomes in 1938 were not ascertainable.

<sup>7</sup> "Family" in this study refers to any group of persons living as a unit and sharing expenses and earnings. Unattached persons are considered "one-person families."

Size of family is of course closely related to number of workers in the family, and both are factors influencing family earnings. (See appendix table 12.) Large families with earnings from more than one worker were especially common among migratory workers. The average migratory family had 5 persons and 2.8 working members, compared with an average of 4.5 persons and only 1.8 workers in nonmigratory families.<sup>8</sup> This difference in number of workers was explained partly by the fact that in agricultural work jobs were available during the busy season for all members of the family who were old enough to work. The migratory families showed a smaller increase in total income for 1938 with each additional worker than did the nonmigratory families, however. (See appendix table 13.)

Taking total family income from pecan work separately from total family income from migratory work and from miscellaneous nonmigratory work, it is found that the close relationship of earnings to number of workers holds. Families with only one pecan worker, for example, averaged only \$109 from pecan shelling in 1938, while the average income from this source was \$148 for all families, and families with three pecan workers averaged \$266. (See appendix table 14.)

The low average earnings of all families from pecan work—only \$148—might be understandable if the work had been highly seasonal in 1938; but, as noted above, shelling continued on an unusually high level in most of the plants during the summer of that year, possibly in anticipation of the application of the wage-hour law. The most important factors causing irregularity of employment in 1938 were extraseasonal ones: the strike during February, when about half of the 12,000 workers in the industry were out at one time or another; and the shutdown of most of the plants from October to December after the Fair Labor Standards Act became effective.

Family income solely from migratory work was also correlated with number of workers per family. (See appendix table 15.) Many of those employed in cotton and beet work were children between the ages of 10 and 19. Of 93 persons who were employed longer in cotton work than in any other occupation in 1938, 63 percent were under 20. Of 55 workers employed longest in beets, 44 percent were under 20. This compares very unfavorably with pecan shelling, in which only 21 percent of the workers were under 20.

Fewer members per family, on the average, were engaged in miscellaneous nonmigratory occupations than in pecan and agricultural work. Earnings in this category were much higher than in pecan or agricultural work in cases where more than one member of the family

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<sup>8</sup> For all families combined, the average number of workers per family was two.





*Texas Work Projects Administration.*

*Part of a Pecan Sheller's Family: Four Adults and Eleven  
Children Live in Two Rooms.*

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was engaged in such miscellaneous occupations, however. (See appendix table 16.)

#### Income in Relation to Time Spent

The relation of income to the number of days spent at work by various family members also varies according to the type of job. In pecan work the small family incomes which prevailed were due primarily to the low wage structure in the industry rather than to any lack of work. The total number of individual worker-days spent in pecan shelling during 1938 by all members of the average (median) family amounted to 330.<sup>9</sup> Even the migratory families averaged a total of 303 worker-days spent in pecan work during the year. Only 11 percent of all families had spent less than 200 individual worker-days in pecan shelling. These families earned an average of only \$40 from pecans during the year, compared with an average of \$219 earned in pecan work by families who had spent 350 or more individual worker-days in the shelling industry. (See appendix table 17.)

The part of the year during which seasonal agricultural labor is employed is of course shorter than the pecan-shelling season, and the total time spent by the 118 migratory families in agricultural work averaged only 178 individual worker-days per family. Earnings from this type of work in 1938 ranged from an average of \$47 for those who had put in less than 100 individual worker-days to \$218 for those families whose members had worked for 350 or more individual worker-days. (See appendix table 18.)

The average family among the 235 which had one or more members in miscellaneous nonmigratory work managed to pick up 277 individual worker-days of this type of work in 1938. The increase in income according to time spent was greater in miscellaneous work than in pecan or agricultural work. (See appendix table 19.)

#### EFFECTS OF LOW WAGE LEVELS

The net result of these low wage standards in all lines of work has been the progressive impoverishment of the pecan shellers and of the Mexican community as a whole in San Antonio. A decade ago the Mexican worker could be fairly sure of earning about a dollar a day throughout most of the year, either at pecan work, agricultural labor, or miscellaneous jobs. Today few workers are able to earn even that low wage. Moreover, mechanization of pecan shelling and agriculture is further reducing opportunities for the Mexicans,

<sup>9</sup>These figures are necessarily rough, since they are obtained by multiplying the length of each job by the number of workers on that job at any time. Thus, if a pecan-shelling job lasted 110 days, and three members of the family worked at it, although one of these worked only part of the time, the estimated total individual worker-days would be 330 for the year.

although in some cases it may result in higher earnings for those who are fortunate enough to retain their employment.

The extremely low wages of the Mexicans have also depressed wage scales generally in San Antonio to some extent, especially where Mexicans and non-Mexicans compete with each other in the labor market. For example, Mexican waiters work as much as 12 hours a day for 7 days each week for \$3 to \$5 a week plus tips; and Americans of Anglo-Saxon stock who are waitresses in some of the best restaurants find it necessary to accept jobs at only \$3 to \$6 a week plus tips, with a day off each week in some cases.

The effect of cheap Mexican labor on the general wage level is suggested by table 5, in which 1938 average weekly earnings in San Antonio are compared with those in other cities of comparable size, in Texas and in other parts of the United States.

**Table 5.—Average Weekly Earnings in Manufacturing and Nonmanufacturing Industries in San Antonio and Selected Cities of Comparable Size, 1938**

City	1938 average weekly earnings <sup>1</sup>	Population <sup>2</sup>
United States (manufacturing only) .....	\$22.84	
San Antonio .....	20.18	231,542
Dallas .....	24.26	260,475
Houston .....	24.55	292,352
Atlanta .....	20.22	270,366
Toledo .....	26.28	290,718
Omaha .....	24.86	214,006
Oakland .....	26.94	284,063

<sup>1</sup> Data furnished by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U. S. Department of Labor, Washington, D. C.

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930*, Population Vol. I, U. S. Department of Commerce, Washington, D. C., 1931, p. 18.

It will be noticed that earnings were much higher in Houston and in Dallas than in San Antonio. The only city in this group with earnings approximately as low as San Antonio was Atlanta, where cheap Negro labor had an effect on the labor market similar to that of Mexican labor in San Antonio.

Unemployment, underemployment, low wages, and general insecurity have also had a profoundly depressing effect on the Mexican community itself in recent years. Some of these effects will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

## Chapter III

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### **SOCIAL CONDITIONS AMONG THE PECAN SHELLERS**

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**LOW WAGE** scales in all lines of work available to the Mexicans, aggravated by diminishing employment in pecan shelling and in agriculture, have resulted in extremely depressed economic and social conditions among the pecan shellers and in the Mexican community as a whole. In the first place, the Mexicans have been forced into dependence upon public relief and assistance in large numbers, a fact resented by many non-Mexicans in San Antonio. The pecan shellers have resorted to relief even more frequently than other Mexicans, especially after the shutdown of the shelling industry. If a similar shutdown had occurred in a more stable, better-paid industry, the immediate effect might not have been a crisis involving actual danger of starvation, as was true in the pecan-shelling industry. But in this case the workers were already the most impoverished group in the Mexican community, and they had no alternative to asking for aid when they lost such jobs as they had had in pecan shelling.

Associated with the immediate problem of relief for the Mexican pecan shellers are numerous social problems of longer range. These include the high incidence of overcrowded and unfit housing, lack of sanitary facilities, poor health, lack of schooling, juvenile delinquency, and racial discrimination. All of these conditions have common roots in the low incomes and irregular employment of the Mexican workers.

#### **PUBLIC ASSISTANCE AND THE PECAN SHELLERS**

The relief situation among the pecan shellers may be summarized as follows: (1) Privation and need were common among workers in the pecan industry under the old system of hand shelling even when the plants were operating full time; (2) when the shutdown occurred, private charity was insufficient to keep the Mexican workers

in food and the necessities of life; (3) therefore heavy demands were made by the Mexicans on public-assistance agencies; (4) but these demands have not been adequately met, because of lack of funds for Federal assistance and because of the failure of the local and State governments to provide subsidiary assistance in the form of cash.

#### **Inadequacy of Private Charity**

In San Antonio, as in other cities during the depression, private charitable institutions have limited themselves to caring for certain types of indigent unemployable persons, which exclude most of the pecan shellers. Of 537 families aided by the Associated Charities, San Antonio's largest private agency, in December 1938, no more than 25 percent were Mexicans, and few if any of these were pecan shellers. The only regular private agency which assisted the jobless shellers to any considerable extent was the Salvation Army, whose bread line provided food to some 300 persons daily during the winter of 1938-39. About 90 percent of those aided were Mexicans, most of them being unemployed pecan shellers who walked 2 miles or more from the West Side to obtain a loaf or two of bread.

Two other private organizations set up emergency facilities to keep the pecan shellers from starving during the shutdown period, but they functioned only for a few weeks. First the CIO Pecan Workers' Union opened a soup kitchen, which fed several hundred of the neediest workers. Soon afterward members of the Guadalupe Catholic Church, under the direction of Father Carmelo Tranchese, set up a relief depot on the West Side. The church obtained private donations of food sufficient to feed a thousand or more families for several weeks. Some 7,200 persons benefited by church rations on Thanksgiving Day, 1938.

But these temporary arrangements were never sufficient to meet the needs of the unemployed pecan shellers. Therefore applications for public assistance increased constantly during the winter months.

#### **Extent of Dependence Among Pecan Shellers**

Of the 512 pecan-shelling families 450, or 88 percent, had received some income from "sources other than employment" during 1938. The average (median) amount received was \$11.92 for an average period of 75 days. The modal group consisted of 124 families who received help with a total value of only \$5 to \$9.99. Over half of the relief cases covered a period of 60 to 79 days. This is accounted for by the shutdown which lasted from October 24 to the end of 1938, during which time the great majority of the shellers were forced to ask for assistance, either from the Guadalupe Church food depot, the CIO soup kitchen, or the agency distributing Federal surplus commodities.

More than 70 percent of those who were dependent on relief or public aid in 1938 received assistance in the form of surplus commodities, over 15 percent obtained church relief, and over 10 percent received Social Security benefits. The average value of the assistance received was estimated by the recipients at 16 cents or less per day (excluding Social Security benefits).

**Table 6.**—Families of Pecan Shellers Who Received Public and Private Assistance in 1938, Exclusive of Federal Work Programs, by Source and Amount Received per Case

Type of assistance	Number of cases	Percent (of total interviewed) who received assistance	Average <sup>1</sup> daily amount received
Total receiving assistance.....	<sup>2</sup> 450	<sup>2</sup> 88	
Public assistance:			
Surplus commodities.....	316	72	\$0.14
Direct relief <sup>3</sup> .....	39	8	.14
Other public relief.....	13	3	.13
Social Security benefits.....	56	11	.04
Private assistance:			
Church.....	78	15	.14
Support from relatives.....	11	2	.10
Other sources.....	19	4	.16

<sup>1</sup> Median.

<sup>2</sup> Totals eliminate overlapping.

<sup>3</sup> Not cash relief; includes clothing, hospital care, etc.

Data were not available on the total number of pecan shellers who received public assistance from the various programs. Estimates were obtained, however, of the total number of Mexican persons or families dependent on each program, and these bore out the survey findings in showing a very high rate of dependency on public assistance among the Mexicans.

Official figures or estimates of the number of Mexicans dependent on the principal Federal programs operating in Bexar County in January 1939 show an extremely high proportion of dependency among the Mexicans.

**Table 7.**—Estimated Dependence on Public Assistance of Mexicans in Bexar County, Texas, January 1, 1939

Agency	Number benefited
Total.....	13,300
Works Progress Administration.....	3,600
National Youth Administration.....	1,200
Civilian Conservation Corps.....	900
Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation.....	5,000
Unemployment Compensation Commission.....	1,800
Old-age assistance.....	800

Allowing for a generous margin of error, for the fact that most of the figures were for Bexar County rather than for San Antonio

(which contains 79 percent of the county's population), and for duplication, it may safely be concluded that about half of San Antonio's approximately 20,000 Mexican families were dependent for their subsistence, wholly or in part, upon some sort of public aid at the beginning of 1939. Without this aid, malnutrition and actual starvation would undoubtedly have taken a much heavier toll than they did in the Mexican community during the depression.

Yet there is ample evidence that the needs of the Mexicans were greater by far than the amount of assistance given them, and that the various programs of assistance excluded many of the neediest pecan shellers because of certain technicalities. An examination of the actual workings of some of the programs as they have affected the Mexican pecan shellers will cast some light on this problem.

#### **The Works Progress Administration**

The Works Progress Administration was the greatest single source of income to unemployed Mexicans at the time of the pecan industry shutdown. Over 53 percent of the county's 6,783 certified workers were Mexicans in January 1939. Since the Mexicans comprise not more than 40 percent of the population, they were dependent on WPA to a much greater extent than was the general population.

Mexican agricultural workers complained, however, of the difficulty of getting back on WPA jobs when they arrived in San Antonio without funds in 1938. According to the official report of one social worker in the San Antonio district:

\* \* \* there are fewer people leaving the county each season for seasonal labor. One reason for this is the fact that each year they are unable to be placed on the project when they return. The same thing has occurred this year. The workers returned penniless, as usual, and were unable to be assigned, because at the time they returned no assignments were being made.

Early in January 1939, in a period when WPA rolls generally were being cut, an exception was made for the Mexican pecan workers of San Antonio because of their extreme need after the pecan industry had closed down. To meet the needs of this group, 1,800 new jobs were made available on a temporary basis by WPA.

A requirement was then in effect that WPA workers must have obtained their first citizenship papers prior to June 21, 1938. A majority of the heads of families among the pecan shellers could not qualify under this requirement, even though most of them had wives or children who were citizens. Partly as a result of this fact, only 702 unemployed pecan workers had been certified for WPA under the special allotment by the end of January 1939. But this special allocation of jobs, though not completely utilized by the pecan workers, averted a great deal of suffering on the West Side.



The cuts in the WPA rolls in 1939 seriously affected the Mexicans. The increasingly strict citizenship requirements placed on WPA by Congress also rendered many pecan shellers and other Mexicans ineligible for work relief. In January 1939 the provision was made by Congress that WPA jobs would be limited to citizens. This rule had the effect of cutting off about 225 Mexicans (who had previously been eligible because they had their first papers) from the WPA rolls in Bexar County.

#### Surplus Commodities

For those workers who were unable to qualify for or to obtain work relief, no direct relief for rent and other necessities was available in 1939. Until 1936 a small amount of cash relief had been given by the State of Texas to the unemployed, but since then no funds had been made available for that purpose by the State legislature. The Texas Relief Commission, which had previously handled cash relief, thereafter took as its chief functions the distribution of Federal surplus commodities and the supervision of certifying agencies.

In San Antonio the City-County Family Welfare Agency, under the supervision of the Texas Relief Commission, was certifying people as eligible for work relief, Civilian Conservation Corps, and Federal surplus commodities at the time of the pecan industry shut-down. In January 1939 this agency had only 6 case workers to handle all its cases, including over 8,000 families who were receiving surplus commodities. In addition to the difficulties entailed by this inadequate staff, nearly every pecan sheller interviewed who had received surplus commodities said that the kinds and amounts of food distributed were inadequate to last the full month for which they were intended.

The number of families receiving surplus commodities in Bexar County increased greatly during 1938, rising from 3,169 in June 1938 to 8,375 in January 1939, largely because of unemployment among the Mexicans. Mrs. Clare Green, county supervisor of social work, estimated that of the latter figure at least 60 percent were Mexicans, there being no citizenship requirement for this type of relief.

The need for cash relief to supplement the surplus commodities given out caused considerable unrest early in 1939. The Pecan Workers' Union led several delegations to the City Commission, asking that funds for direct relief be provided by the city. No such relief grants were made, however, the reason given by Mayor C. K. Quinn being, "We do not have the money, it is impossible to get it, and if we got it we would have no legal right to spend it."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *San Antonio Light*, San Antonio, Tex., April 6, 1939.

### Social Security Programs

Unemployment compensation had been of some assistance to the Mexicans, but under the provisions of the Texas system Mexican pecan workers were handicapped in several ways.

First, an employer, to come under the law, must have employed 8 or more individuals for 20 or more weeks out of the year. This provision excluded many small pecan-shelling contractors who operated only 3 or 4 months each year at the season's peak, or who employed only a few workers. Second, the "covered" industries in which the minimum qualifying amount of \$72 could be earned specifically excluded agriculture, in which many of the pecan shellers worked during approximately half of the year. Third, family earnings were not counted as a unit under the law; and many individual pecan shellers under the old handwork system were not able to earn the necessary \$72 in the 9-month qualifying period, even when working fairly steadily in shelling or other covered industries.

Mr. Wright Riley, district supervisor for the Unemployment Compensation Commission, estimated that of the 3,000 claims for unemployment compensation filed by pecan shellers in San Antonio by the end of 1938 about 40 percent had been disapproved. For 3 months subsequent to the shutdown of the pecan industry in 1938, according to the claims adjuster, about 75 percent of the claimants interviewed were pecan workers. It was estimated that about 1,800 pecan workers had actually received unemployment compensation by the end of 1938.

Those pecan shellers who qualified for unemployment compensation, according to the adjuster, received total sums averaging less than \$20. Pecan crackers averaged about \$25 and pickers about \$15, spread over a period of 3 to 6 weeks.

The old-age insurance system has had little effect in alleviating need among the Mexicans. During 1937 and 1938 in San Antonio only 243 lump-sum benefits at age 65, and 360 benefits at death, were paid. These benefits averaged \$27.54 per person. According to F. J. McCarthy, manager of the San Antonio old-age insurance field office, Mexican claims usually amounted to only about \$10 or \$12. Pecan workers as a rule received even less. The reasons for the small sums paid to Mexican laborers were, as in the case of unemployment compensation, that agricultural labor was not covered, and that wages in covered industries had in the past been very low.

The revisions in the old-age insurance program made by Congress in 1939 stood to benefit the Mexican pecan shellers, as well as other low-paid workers. (There was a bare possibility that pecan shelling might later be excluded from coverage by a technical ruling to the effect that the processing of nuts is included in the processing of fruits, which was exempted in one of the 1939 amendments. This is

botanically correct; but such an interpretation seems unlikely.) The date upon which regular monthly benefits were to begin was moved up to January 1, 1940, and the rate of payment was increased to 40 percent of the worker's average monthly wage (up to \$50) in covered industries. But the average pecan worker in 1938, earning perhaps \$10 per month, would have received only \$4 per month if he had retired at 65 under these provisions. On the other hand, those who are fortunate enough to have jobs at a minimum wage of 25 or 30 cents per hour under the provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act, for long enough to raise their average level of wages, might draw as much as \$20 per month upon reaching 65.

Old-age assistance in Texas, unlike the other two Social Security programs (unemployment compensation and old-age insurance), has a citizenship requirement which has disqualified a large section of the Mexican population, particularly the older people. The program operates on a basis of need, paying maximum monthly benefits of \$30. In December 1938 an average of \$14.72 per person was paid out to 4,374 needy persons over 65 years of age in Bexar County. A check of names on the rolls showed that fewer than 20 percent of the recipients had Spanish names. It may be assumed that most of these were of Mexican extraction. It is apparent from this low percentage that the citizenship requirement excluded many of the Mexicans, the most needy group in the city, from the rolls.

With the growing trends toward mechanization both of agriculture and of the pecan-shelling industry, the Mexicans' need for public assistance seems likely to increase rather than to decrease in the near future. Only when private employment at living wages is available to the Mexican worker will he be able to end his dependence upon the Government for his livelihood.

### OTHER SOCIAL CONDITIONS

The pecan-shelling industry in San Antonio is concentrated for the most part in the West Side of the city. In this area of about 4 square miles, almost completely Spanish in its written and spoken language, live at least 65,000 of San Antonio's estimated 100,000 Mexicans. Here also is one of the most extensive slums to be found in any American city, with decrepit wooden shacks and crowded "courts" overflowing with Mexican families who are forced by poverty to live there, at rentals as low as 50 cents to a dollar per week.

#### Housing

Of the 512 families of pecan shellers who were interviewed, the average (median) number of rooms per family was only 2.2, while the average family consisted of 4.6 persons. There were 28 families,

ranging from 5 to 10 persons, each of which lived in a single room.

Most of the pecan workers—77 percent—rented their houses. The average number of rooms in the rented houses was 2.1, while the 117 who owned their homes had a median of 2.6 rooms. The average amount paid for the rented houses was \$4.49 per month, or slightly over \$1 per week. Over 5 percent of the renters paid no rent at all, living with relatives or in deserted or makeshift shacks. Another 8 percent paid only \$1 to \$2 per month rent.

**Table 8.—Families of Pecan Shellers, by Size and Average Number of Persons per Room, 1938**

Family size	Percent distribution of families <sup>1</sup>	Average <sup>1</sup> number of rooms per family	Average <sup>1</sup> number of persons per room
Total .....	100	2.2	2.1
1 person .....	3	1.4	0.7
2 persons .....	8	1.8	1.1
3 persons .....	19	2.0	1.5
4 persons .....	18	2.1	1.9
5 persons .....	17	2.2	2.3
6 persons .....	11	2.4	2.5
7 persons .....	9	2.6	2.7
8 persons .....	6	2.3	3.5
9 persons .....	3	3.0	3.0
10 persons or more .....	6	2.7	—

<sup>1</sup> Median.

NOTE.—Based on 506 families; excludes 6 families for which number of rooms was not ascertainable.

Some idea of living conditions among the pecan workers may be gained from the fact that only 60, or 12 percent, had running water inside their houses. Only 9 percent had inside sanitary toilets, while 39 percent had old-fashioned “privies.” The balance had outdoor toilets either of the sanitary pit type constructed in large numbers in recent years by WPA labor, or with cesspool or sewer connections.

Lighting facilities were equally primitive. Only 25 percent of the families had electric lights, the other three-fourths used kerosene lamps.

Some progress has been made in recent years toward eliminating the worst of the slums on the West Side. As a result of a campaign by the Junior Chamber of Commerce and other civic bodies, a slum clearance section was added to the city health department in 1935. Under a city ordinance which had been passed in 1915 to regulate sanitation, the city razed 1,502 of the worst slum dwellings on the West Side prior to August 1938. But this program provided no new houses to take the place of those which were destroyed.

In June 1937 the San Antonio Housing Authority was created by the city, under the terms of the United States Housing Act. It



*Texas Work Projects Administration.*

*Housing Conditions in the Mexican Quarter: Rent, Fifty  
Cents per Week.*

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immediately made a survey of 6,723, or half, of the 13,447 Mexican families living in the West Side area. It found about 90 percent of the dwelling units inhabited by these families to be definitely below the standards set by the Authority.

**Table 9.**—Condition of Dwellings Owned and Rented by Mexicans in the West Side Area of San Antonio <sup>1</sup>

Status of dwelling	Total	Standard	Substand- ard	Percent substand- ard
Total .....	6, 723	661	6, 062	90
Owned .....	707	133	574	81
Rented .....	5, 736	523	5, 213	91
No data .....	280	5	275	98

<sup>1</sup> Data furnished by the San Antonio Housing Authority, San Antonio, Tex.

The next step taken by the Housing Authority was to obtain an allocation of \$3,588,000 in Federal funds for a housing project for Mexicans. Together with the city's contribution, this will allow a \$4,000,000 project to be built just west of Alazan Creek. The revised plans, as of January 1939, called for an area of more than 35 acres, covering 23 square blocks of the West Side. The completed project was to contain 1,260 housing units of modernistic Spanish architecture.

The new units were to rent for \$2 per room per month, including hot water but not other utilities, or about \$6.75 per month for three rooms and a bath with utilities. But many Mexican families now living in the area are paying only \$2 per month rent for their shacks, and will not be able to afford even the low rents contemplated for the project. Only 59 percent of the 5,213 renters who were living in substandard dwellings surveyed by the Housing Authority had incomes above the minimum annual incomes of \$350 to \$850 (depending on the size of family) which were to be required of renters in the new project. Of the 512 pecan workers' families only 154, or 30 percent, had incomes above \$350 in 1938, and many of these did not have the higher incomes required for families with several children.

The Housing Authority has a long-range program to provide for at least 3,000 to 5,000 new housing units to replace the worst of the slums on the Mexican West Side. In addition to the funds for the present project, \$5,600,000 in Federal funds had been earmarked for housing projects in San Antonio by early in 1939.

### Health

San Antonio's high death and disease rates are due primarily to the extremely high rates among the Mexican people. In 1938 San Antonio had 12.5 deaths per 1,000 population, compared with a national

average of approximately 10.7. There were 148 deaths from tuberculosis per 100,000 population in 1937 and 129 in 1938, compared with a national average of 54 in 1937. There were 103 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in 1937 and 81 in 1938.

On the West Side malnutrition, poor housing, lack of sanitation, and inadequate medical care take their heaviest toll. Table 10 shows the extremely high incidence of deaths from certain diseases among the Mexicans (Latin Americans).

**Table 10.—Deaths From Selected Causes, by Racial Groups, San Antonio, 1938 <sup>1</sup>**

Item	All races	White	Latin American <sup>2</sup>	Negro
Estimated population:				
Number.....	<sup>3</sup> 265,000	145,000	100,000	20,000
Percent.....	100	55	38	7
Total deaths:				
Number.....	<sup>4</sup> 3,318	1,531	1,515	265
Percent.....	100	46	46	8
Deaths from selected causes:				
Tuberculosis.....	341	71	247	23
Causes related to childbirth.....	37	7	28	2
Diarrhea and enteritis.....	246	26	207	13
Pneumonia.....	328	109	206	13
Influenza.....	49	15	32	2
Syphilis.....	39	6	22	1
Selected death rates:				
Tuberculosis rate per 100,000 population.....	129	47	247	115
Infant rate per 1,000 live births:				
Under 1 month.....	33	25	38	52
Under 1 year.....	81	36	120	68

<sup>1</sup> Based on data from *Annual Report*, Department of Health, San Antonio, Tex., 1938.

<sup>2</sup> Designation for Mexican used by the San Antonio Department of Health.

<sup>3</sup> Estimate of San Antonio Department of Health.

<sup>4</sup> Includes 7 deaths of "other races."

Over 72 percent of all tuberculosis deaths in San Antonio in 1938 were among Mexicans, although this group made up only 38 percent of the population. Of the tuberculosis patients from the Mexican West Side, more than 75 percent came from homes where there were unemployment, poor housing, and malnutrition, according to Mr. George Craze, executive secretary of the Bexar County Tuberculosis Association. In 1938 the department of health indicated that some 1,448 cases of tuberculosis were reported among children under 13 years of age. Of these cases 77 percent were Mexican children.

It is significant that the Mexican death rate from tuberculosis dropped from 1928 to 1930; then stayed about even (at a level approximately twice as high as the rate for the whole population) from 1930 to 1935; and rose again from 1935 to 1937. The fact that the death rate among the Mexicans did not rise during the worst years of the depression was due largely to the supplementary rations which they received from the Government; this gave them a more adequate diet than they had been able to obtain without Government aid prior to the depression, according to Mrs. Frances Gayle, head nurse for the city department of health.



The Mexican infant mortality rate, 120 per 1,000 live births in 1938, is one of the highest in the Nation. Non-Mexican children have a good chance of living if they get through the first month of infancy, while the high death rate among Mexican children continues throughout the first year. Diarrhea and enteritis are extremely important causes of the high infant mortality rate among the Mexicans. These are the direct result of poor sanitation.

In February 1939 Dr. Adolph Berchermann, chairman of the city health board, an advisory body, issued a report denouncing conditions in San Antonio and in the department of health. He said in part:

The health department does not seem sufficiently interested in harnessing and controlling tuberculosis. Conditions making for the spread of the disease, such as unsanitary privies in the homes of tuberculars and debris-laden premises, go neglected by the department. \* \* \*

The law requiring examination and licensing of midwives has been treated as a joke. There are about 200 midwives practicing within the city. To obtain a license it is necessary merely to pay a small fee and answer a few questions by the city physician, Dr. W. A. King. \* \* \*

To acquire health cards at present the applicant has only to pay 50 cents and to undergo an examination requiring about 5 minutes' time. This examination is too superficial. It should consist, instead, of laboratory tests and other definite proof that the applicant is not a carrier of typhoid, dysentery, or tuberculosis.<sup>2</sup>

#### Education

According to the 1930 Census, 7.7 percent of San Antonio's population 10 years of age and over could not read or write. Almost nine-tenths of the city's 14,462 illiterates were Mexicans, the proportion of illiteracy being 15.7 percent in this group.<sup>3</sup>

Illiteracy is decreasing as the younger generation of American-born Mexicans grows up, since most of them attend school at least long enough to learn to read and write. But the proportion of youth attending school at various ages is much lower in San Antonio than in the State as a whole, or in other Texas cities. This is largely because of the inability of the Mexicans, particularly the peacan shellers and the agricultural workers who form the poorest strata of the population, to keep their children steadily in school (table 11).

Mr. Raymond Brewer, principal of Sidney Lanier High School, estimates that there are about 3,000 Mexican children of school age in San Antonio who have never entered school, and that only one-half to two-thirds of the Mexican children entering primary school finish the fifth grade. The principal reason for this is poverty.

<sup>2</sup> *San Antonio Light*, San Antonio, Tex., February 20, 1939.

<sup>3</sup> Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930*, Population Vol. III, Part 2, U. S. Department of Commerce, Washington, D. C., 1932, pp. 945 and 1009.

**Table 11.**—Percent of Youth Attending School, San Antonio Compared With Texas, 1930<sup>1</sup>

Age group	San Antonio	State of Texas	Urban Texas
7-13 years.....	89.9	88.7	92.7
14-15 years.....	80.3	84.6	86.9
16-17 years.....	49.0	57.2	59.4
18-20 years.....	16.3	19.8	22.3

<sup>1</sup> Data from Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*, Population Vol. III, Part 2, U. S. Department of Commerce, Washington, D. C., 1932, p. 1009.

Some families cannot buy clothing for their children; or because of seasonal work, they are not able to be in town consistently enough to enter their children in school.

Of the Mexican families in San Antonio who do seasonal agricultural labor, many do not return to San Antonio and put their children in school until after the cotton and beet seasons are over, or as late as November or December in many cases; and some of them start leaving San Antonio, with their families, for the beet fields or for cotton chopping as early as April or May. Since the regular school term of 36 weeks starts in September and ends the last of May, children of the Mexican agricultural workers are severely handicapped. They tend to become retarded and to drop out of school at an early age. During the school year 1937-38, attendance at one school in the Mexican district varied from 740 at the beginning of the term to 1,499 in February.

Among the 512 pecan-shelling families studied, there were 867 children between the ages of 7 and 18. Of these, only 55 percent attended the full school term and only 62 percent attended school at all in 1938. The 217 children of migratory workers were handicapped to an even greater extent than the 650 children of families who lived in San Antonio throughout the year. In the migratory group, for example, 22 percent of the children aged 11 to 13 did not attend school in 1938, while in the nonmigratory group the corresponding figure was only 11 percent. (See appendix table 20.)

Almost one-sixth of the pecan shellers' children aged 8 and 9 years had never attended school or had never completed the first grade. The average school attainment of 10-year olds in the pecan shellers' families was 2.7 grades, and that of 13-year olds, 4.9 grades. Of the 18-year-old children for whom information was obtained (82 in all), 5 percent had never completed even one grade in school; 62 percent had completed one to five grades; 29 percent had completed six to eight grades, the junior high school level; 4 percent had completed the first year of senior high school; and none had completed the eleventh grade, to graduate from high school. The average grade attainment for both boys and girls at the age of 18 was 5.2 grades. (See appendix table 21.)

### Social Disorganization and Discrimination

Among the by-products of the depressed conditions under which the Mexicans live are delinquency and prostitution, which are concentrated in the heart of the Mexican slum area in the West Side.

Former Chief of Police Owen Kilday said in 1939 that he kept more police on the West Side than anywhere else in the city. Said Chief Kilday, "Crime breeds where there is poverty. Your poverty-stricken class is your criminal class."

According to the records of Police Sergeant P. R. Halleron, however, in 1938 the number of Mexicans (14) actually arrested per 1,000 population was lower than the number of Negroes (28) or "Americans"<sup>4</sup> (25). The only major types of offenses for which Mexicans as a group had a higher rate of arrests than either Negroes or "Americans" were "drunkenness, disorderly conduct, and disturbing the peace." This was mainly because several hundred pecan shellers had been arrested during the strike of 1938 for "blocking the sidewalks," "congregating in unlawful assemblies," and otherwise "disturbing the peace," according to Sergeant Halleron.

Mexican juveniles were arrested in 1938 nearly three times as often in proportion to their population as "American" children, but less often proportionately than Negro children. Over 55 percent of all juvenile arrests in 1938 were of Mexican children. Many of these were cases of truancy; others were petty thefts, usually in the cases of needy families which could not get relief and which were in great need of food, clothing, or shoes. Cases of sex delinquency were often precipitated by overcrowded housing conditions in which two or more families were thrown together in small shacks, or by girls needing work so badly as to accept jobs as barmaids or "hostesses" in taverns of questionable repute, according to local juvenile court authorities.

The relationship of poverty, such as that among the pecan shellers, to prostitution is made clear in the following statement by Mrs. R. Van Eaton, Salvation Army worker:

The girls in those houses don't want to be there. They do it only because they have worn themselves out looking for work. If they could get a job with a living wage, they would leave.

Since the pecan industry has shut down, many new Mexican girls have come into the vice district. They come down there evenings to work, and take their earnings back to their parents. Sometimes their parents don't know where they go. The girls refuse to let their parents go hungry. In the last 3 months, since the shelleries shut down, there have been more under-age girls down there than ever before. Some of them are only 13 years old.

<sup>4</sup>The San Antonio police department used this term to designate Americans of European extraction.

Mexican citizens have been unable effectively to press for a remedy for these conditions through the ballot in the past because a comparatively small number of Mexicans vote in San Antonio. In 1939, a record year for votes in the local elections, only 9,374 poll taxes were paid by Mexicans. There were two reasons for this. First, at least half of the Mexicans of voting age were not citizens. A check of 150 pecan-shelling families indicated that only about a third of the family heads were citizens. Second, the State poll tax of \$1.50 per year was more than most Mexican wage earners could afford to pay.

The traditional role of the Mexican in politics was described as follows by residents of San Antonio in 1930, for the hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization of the House of Representatives:

Dependent on their jobs as city or county employees, they follow the commands of bosses at elections. They are so closely watched that they cannot do otherwise.

Officials here buy poll taxes for the Mexican that shows up on election day, then see that he votes their way. Makes it impossible to get a good man in any office, city or county. Makes it hard in enforcing laws.<sup>5</sup>

This control of the Mexican vote was first challenged successfully by Maury Maverick, who won a majority on the Mexican West Side when he ran for reelection to Congress in 1936. In 1938, when he was defeated in the Congressional primaries, and in 1939, when he was elected mayor of San Antonio, Maverick won a sizable majority of the Mexican votes. Maverick had pledged himself to do what he could to remedy the plight of the Mexicans.

The general population of San Antonio, however, shows little interest in the problems of the Mexicans. A typical remark concerning them is, "Oh, well—all they need are a few tortillas and frijoles and they're satisfied." One local public official expressed the belief that "if they earned more than \$1 a day, they'd just spend their money on tequila and on worthless trinkets in the dime stores."

The owner of one pecan-shelling business expressed himself as follows:

The Mexicans don't want much money. \* \* \* Compared to those shanties they live in, the pecan shelleries are fine. They are glad to have a warm place to sit in the winter. They can be warm while they're shelling pecans, they can talk to their friends while they're working, their kids come in after school and play because it's better than going home. If they get hungry they can eat pecans.

If they put the 25-cent minimum wage law over on us, all these Mexicans will be replaced by white girls. The Mexicans have no business here anyway. They flock into San Antonio with their kind, and then they cause labor troubles or go on relief at the expense of the taxpayer.

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<sup>5</sup> *Immigration From Countries of the Western Hemisphere*, Hearings Before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, House of Representatives, 71st Cong., 2d sess., March 14, 1930, p. 598.

According to the manager of another pecan plant, "If those Mexicans get the minimum wage, they'll only work 3 days a week and then quit, because that would be all the money they'd want." Early in 1939, however, more than a thousand Mexican pecan shellers were working at a high rate of speed 5½ days each week at the Southern Pecan Shelling Co.'s plants in order to keep their 25-cent-an-hour jobs.

During the depression non-Mexican workers feared that the Mexicans would compete with them for jobs, forcing wages down; and businessmen objected to the large number of Mexicans who were dependent on public assistance. Both groups looked down on the Mexicans because of their race and their foreign language and customs. In some cases this feeling was so strong as to lead to demands for deporting the Mexicans.

As for the Mexicans, their reactions to this situation are most clearly shown by their objection to the use of the term "white" in such a way as to exclude Mexicans. They prefer to call whites of European extraction "Anglo-Americans" or "Anglos." The Mexicans are conscious of such Spanish blood as they may have, and are not ashamed of their predominantly Indian blood. They jealously guard against any move that would set them apart from the self-styled "white race."

The Mexican is nevertheless segregated from the rest of the community almost as effectively as the Negro. He is not kept apart from the "Anglo-Americans" in laboratories, waiting rooms, and public vehicles by law as is the Negro, but his poverty and low wages segregate him in the poorest sections of the city, in the day coaches of the railroads, in the balconies of the less pretentious theaters, and in the cheapest restaurants. These circumstances tend to perpetuate the social handicaps under which the Mexicans, and especially the pecan shellers and others of low economic status, are forced to live.

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## Chapter IV

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### *PROSPECTS FOR THE PECAN SHELLERS*

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**THE GROWING** surplus of Mexican labor in San Antonio and Texas is not a new problem. The reduction of cotton acreage and the growing mechanization of farming in Texas have been gradually reducing employment opportunities in migratory agricultural work for some years. But with the partial mechanization of the pecan-shelling industry, unemployment is greatly intensified. And most of the displaced workers are more or less permanently located in San Antonio. About 96 percent of the shellers interviewed either paid rent on their San Antonio houses during the entire year, even when they were working in the cotton or beet fields, or (as was true in a considerable minority of cases) owned their homes there.

#### **PROSPECTS FOR REEMPLOYMENT**

An examination of the prospects for reemployment of the Mexicans in the various industries of San Antonio and the surrounding region will cast some light on the opportunities which are likely to be available to the pecan shellers in the immediate future.

#### **Pecan Shelling**

Future developments in the pecan-shelling industry turn largely on whether the Fair Labor Standards Act is observed by the industry. As late as June 1939 the act was only partly effective in the shelling plants. Two changes were already sharply apparent as a result of the minimum wage and maximum hours set by the law, however; employment was drastically reduced by such mechanization as had taken place; and average wages had increased, while hours decreased. About half of the 1,600 shellers at work in San Antonio in June were receiving the 25-cent hourly minimum wage set by the act.

If the provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act remain as they are at present, and are fully enforced, mechanization of the entire

pecan-shelling industry is practically assured. Only by the use of machinery will the commercial shellers be able to pay their workers the minimum wage of 25 (or 30) cents an hour and still make a profit.

There is no reason to believe that the industry cannot operate on a paying basis under the wage-hour law with the use of modern machinery. Mechanized methods, with wage standards above the minimum set by the act, have been used in St. Louis, Chicago, Tyler, Tex., and other places for some years. First experiments with mechanization in San Antonio in 1938 showed that a relatively high degree of efficiency could be attained by the former handworkers in a short time, and that operating expenses could be met almost immediately in the shelling of all but the small west Texas pecans. Once the changes were made, the industry would rapidly adjust to new conditions on the basis of a smaller, more efficient labor staff and shorter working hours.

It seems probable that as a result of mechanization the shelling industry would be on a much more stable basis than it was under the old handwork system. The contracting system would be a thing of the past, and seasonality of employment would be greatly reduced. The present minimum wage is attractive enough to keep workers on the job the year round; and the large employers, having cold-storage facilities, should find it profitable to operate all year and thus keep their trained labor forces intact.

A few large companies would probably dominate the mechanized industry to an even greater extent than in the past, since they are better able to finance the installation of machinery than are small operators. By June 1939 only four local operators had installed machinery, and three of these only on a small scale; the Southern Pecan Shelling Co. still had a virtual monopoly on mechanized shelling in San Antonio.

It is hazardous to predict the number of workers who will be employed in shelling pecans in the future if mechanization becomes relatively complete, but an attempt may be made on the basis of certain known factors in the industry. The annual crop of seedling pecans in the entire country during the years 1927-1936 averaged 46,000,000 pounds. Considerably over half of these have been shelled in San Antonio for the past several years. These nuts average 38 percent meats, or at most 11,400,000 pounds of meats out of a possible 30,000,000 pounds of pecans shelled in San Antonio in an average year. The average output per picker in the Southern Pecan Shelling Co.'s plants had already reached 26 pounds per 8-hour day, or about three times as much as under the old handwork system, by the end of 1938. Assuming that the industry will be completely mechanized, and that an average daily production of 30 pounds per picker will be





*Texas Work Projects Administration.*

*Former Pecan Shellers, Too Old to Compete for Jobs in  
Modern Shelling Plants.*

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attained, a year-round labor force of about 1,400 pickers would be required in the entire San Antonio industry. Since pickers constituted about 75 percent of the labor force in the mechanized plants early in 1939, this means that not more than 2,000 workers will be employed in an average year.

This assumes, of course, not only uniform mechanization of the industry, but also the absence of crop variations and seasonal fluctuations in employment. Actually, no such static condition could obtain; but it is likely that in the future, after mechanization spreads through the industry, no more than 2,500 or 3,000 workers will be employed at shelling pecans in San Antonio at any one time, except perhaps in years when bumper crops are produced. This will be less than a third of the peak number usually employed under the old system.

This drop in employment would mean that 7,000 or more persons who formerly shelled pecans during a portion of each year will be unable to find winter jobs in the future. The situation will be ameliorated somewhat by the fact that one person, under the minimum wage, can earn an amount equal to the wages paid to several members of a single family in former days, so that family incomes will be increased in many cases. But there will be thousands of pecan workers, mainly the older, slower, and less efficient ones, who will never again find employment in the industry.

This long-time unemployment problem is a question of major importance to the whole community, since thousands of families who have depended chiefly on pecan shelling for a living will be stranded in San Antonio, and thousands of other families who work in agriculture during part of the year will lose the opportunity of earning a few dollars a week in the winter season.

If, on the other hand, the minimum wage provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act continue to be ignored in a large section of the industry a larger number of pecan shellers will be employed, but wages will drop and annual family incomes may again be almost as low as the \$251 average for 1938. The increasing competition of hand shelling and homework was already being felt in terms of reduced employment in the mechanized plants which were attempting to comply with the wage-hour law early in 1939. If cheap labor continues to be available, the few plants which have installed machines may themselves cut wages and perhaps even return to handwork to some extent.

In spite of the unsettled situation which still existed in 1939, however, the outstanding result of the Fair Labor Standards Act was that the exploitation of the Mexican pecan shellers at wages of 5 cents or less per hour had greatly decreased. Those who were working under the act early in 1939 were earning \$11 for a 44-hour week. In

October 1939 the minimum wage was to be raised to 30 cents per hour, and the maximum hours lowered to 42 per week, which would result in a minimum wage standard of \$12.60 per week. This minimum, if enforced, would raise the Mexican living standard still further.

Evasion of the act may tend to offset these relatively high weekly earnings; but even if enforcement is not achieved, three factors may tend to prevent a complete reversion to the wage scales and conditions of 1938 and earlier: the publicity which the industry has received and the resulting public opinion against the conditions that have existed in the past; the progress which mechanization has already made in the industry, insuring higher production and making possible higher wages, even on a piecework basis; and the foothold which the trade-union movement has gained in the industry.

#### Agriculture

Agricultural labor cannot be expected to absorb many of the displaced Mexican pecan shellers. Agricultural work is highly seasonal; and not only do cotton and beet workers earn too little to enable them to support their families during the slack winter seasons, but also opportunities in agricultural labor are decreasing. Cotton, in particular, has been in a chronically depressed state for several years. Cotton prices are low because of conditions in the world market; the Agricultural Adjustment Administration has caused large areas of cotton to be taken out of production; and in some parts of the State, particularly in the Panhandle region on the edge of the Dust Bowl area, cotton has been replaced by wheat, which has been more profitable in the past few years.

Mechanization of cotton production has also proceeded rapidly, especially on the plains of western Texas, which area is particularly well adapted to the use of tractors and other farm machinery. This has further decreased employment among farm laborers. In Texas and Oklahoma the weighted index of cotton acreage increased 20 percent from 1909 to 1936,<sup>1</sup> while man-hours of employment per acre declined about 30 percent.<sup>2</sup> According to the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, the number of farm tractors in Texas has

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<sup>1</sup> Bressler, Raymond G., Jr. and Hopkins, John A., *Trends in Size of Production of the Aggregate Farm Enterprise, 1909-36*, Report No. A-6, National Research Project, Works Progress Administration, Philadelphia, Pa., July 1938, p. 75. See also Shaw, Eldon E. and Hopkins, John A., *Trends in Employment in Agriculture, 1909-36*, Report No. A-8, National Research Project, Works Progress Administration, Philadelphia, Pa., November 1938, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> Holley, William C. and Arnold, Lloyd E., *Changes in Technology and Labor Requirements in Crop Production: Cotton*, Report No. A-7, National Research Project, Works Progress Administration, Philadelphia, Pa., September 1938, pp. 99 and 105.

increased from 9,000 in 1920 to about 99,000 in 1938.<sup>3</sup> Mexicans working as cotton choppers are also gradually being replaced by machine methods of cultivation.

The same technological trends are operating in sugar beets as in cotton. The tractor has been of paramount importance in the mechanization of sugar-beet growing. Mechanical cultivating and "blocking" of the beets, and the use of trucks instead of horses to haul them to the factory, have replaced many hand laborers. Although average yield per acre increased 10 percent, man-hours of labor required to produce an acre of sugar beets dropped from 112 in 1920-1924 to 94 in 1933-1936.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear from these figures that no expansion of employment opportunities for the Mexicans in agriculture is to be expected in the immediate future; and such employment as there is will continue to be so seasonal and poorly paid that a majority of agricultural workers will be dependent on relief each winter unless they are able to find employment in private industry.

#### Miscellaneous Work

The outlook for the absorption of surplus Mexican workers in private industry in San Antonio is anything but encouraging. San Antonio is not an industrial city. According to the local Chamber of Commerce, the city's most important source of income is the United States Army, which spends about \$38,000,000 a year in San Antonio. Following in decreasing order of importance are the oil industry, wholesale and retail trade, the tourist trade, and manufacturing. The city's 310 manufacturing plants (not including pecan plants) employed only 7,200 persons in 1937, with a total pay roll for the year of \$6,250,000.

Mexicans receive little direct benefit from the Army or the oil industry. A small number are engaged in trade and many more in domestic and personal service catering to the tourist trade. A large number are engaged in agricultural labor away from San Antonio during part of each year, as described above. But most of the Mexicans' incomes are earned in San Antonio, in the manufacturing industries (including pecan shelling) and in various types of unskilled labor.

Many San Antonians believe that an upswing in local business conditions, based largely on the increased expenditures of the United

<sup>3</sup> *San Antonio Express*, San Antonio, Tex., January 20, 1939.

<sup>4</sup> Macy, Loring K. and Others, *Changes in Technology and Labor Requirements in Crop Production: Sugar Beets*, Report No. A-1, National Research Project, Works Progress Administration, Philadelphia, Pa., August 1937, p. 37.

States Army and the extension of the south Texas oil fields, will attract or create new industries in which the Mexicans can find jobs. However, no new industries which would employ the surplus Mexican workers are in sight at present.

Only a sharp increase in general prosperity, creating for these Mexicans jobs not only in San Antonio but also in other sections of the country, could absorb the many thousands who are unemployed or underemployed. If, as seems likely, however, there is a residue of unemployment in the Nation as a whole even when per capita production increases above the 1929 level, then the Mexican workers, most of them unskilled, cannot hope soon to be absorbed in industry.

#### OTHER TRENDS

There has been some tendency for Mexicans to return voluntarily to the country of their origin during the depression. According to the Mexican consul in San Antonio, the Government of Mexico has encouraged skilled Mexican workers to migrate to the industrial cities below the Rio Grande, where in some cases they have found more work than was available in the United States. The Mexican Government has also recently offered to provide tracts of farming land to Mexican nationals who wish to leave the United States. The first group to take advantage of this offer included 9 San Antonio families with 54 members who left the city in May 1939.<sup>5</sup> Only a comparatively small number of families are likely to leave the United States under such an arrangement, however, since most of the Mexicans have close economic and familial ties of many years' standing in this country, and 9 out of every 10 pecan-shelling families include 1 or more citizens of the United States, many of them children born in this country.

Contraction of employment in the pecan industry may be expected to cause a certain number of Mexicans to seek employment and residence in other communities and States where wages and relief rates are higher than in south Texas. According to officials of the Pecan Workers' Union, an unusually large number of Mexicans who left San Antonio for the beet fields of the Midwest in the spring of 1939 did not intend to return to their Texas homes at the end of the season. Judging from previous studies of beet workers,<sup>6</sup> the majority of these may be dependent on relief in their new places of residence during the winter of 1939-40.

No exodus of proportions sufficient to include all of the thousands of San Antonio Mexicans who are unable to support their families by work in private industry is likely to occur, however. The prob-

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<sup>5</sup> *San Antonio Light*, San Antonio, Tex., May 16, 1939.

<sup>6</sup> See footnote 5, p. 29.

lem of long-time unemployment in this group is likely to continue on its present scale for some time to come. Many San Antonians recognize this, and believe that the community should take more responsibility for its Mexican residents in the form of more adequate relief provisions.

The various relief and public-assistance agencies have, as noted above, provided a considerable amount of help to the Mexicans. Without this aid the Mexican community would have suffered hardships even more severe than was the case. But, as has been indicated, even this assistance has been inadequate to meet the needs of the unemployed Mexicans.

The prospect of permanently large relief rolls to provide for the majority of Mexicans during a portion of each year, however, is neither a desirable outlook nor a real solution to the problem. Re-employment is essential in the long run, both from the point of view of the community and that of the Mexicans themselves.

The Mexicans are taking some constructive steps to better their own conditions. These steps include independent political action, unionization, and the establishment of cooperatives.

Mexican voters supported Maury Maverick in his successful campaign for mayor in 1939, as noted above. The new mayor subsequently announced plans to expand the city's health and housing programs on the West Side as rapidly as possible; in addition, the city government gave official support to a drive against usurious loan agencies which had been victimizing Mexicans for many years.

Trade-unionism has spread rapidly among the Mexican workers in recent years, and a majority of those employed in the two principal local industries using Mexican labor—pecan shelling and garment work—belonged to unions by 1939. Wage increases in these and several other industries have been attributable in part to contracts secured by the unions involved.

A few of the Mexicans have also been interested in cooperative action. One group of pecan workers, including officials in the union, opened a small cooperative shelling plant at Westlawn, just outside the city, early in 1939. Lack of sufficient capital to install machinery, however, proved a large obstacle to the success of this enterprise. The unemployed Mexicans found it extremely difficult to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps.

There is a much better prospect for the success of consumers' cooperatives, since little capital is required to open a cooperative store. Such stores might make a valuable contribution to the community by lowering the cost of living to the unemployed and underpaid Mexican workers. Several leaders in the Mexican community were interested in starting consumers' cooperatives in 1939.

### CONCLUSIONS

The situation of the unemployed Mexican pecan shellers of San Antonio represents in accentuated form that of unemployed, underpaid workers everywhere. Abject poverty brings in its train the closely associated problems of poor housing, bad sanitation, poor health, lack of education, and general social disorganization. These conditions can be remedied only by raising the economic status of the submerged group to a level above that of bare subsistence.

Adequate relief is essential to enable the displaced workers to maintain their physical strength and their morale while they are unemployed. But relief cannot take the place of actual employment. Nor is reversion to the handwork methods which prevailed prior to the passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act the answer. This would result in the spreading of employment to some extent, but most of those employed would not be able to get along without supplementary relief.

The inescapable conclusion is that unless and until the unemployed Mexican workers can be absorbed into the normal economic framework of our society, they will be a continuing problem. And the process of reabsorbing the jobless Mexicans presents grave difficulties. Lack of training and experience in skilled types of work, racial discrimination, and other factors act as barriers to their economic assimilation. Until unemployment dwindles in the Nation as a whole, therefore, the unemployed Mexicans will have great difficulty in obtaining work.

The problem of the Mexican pecan shellers, then, can only be dealt with as part of the larger problem of technological unemployment. This question is a challenge to the Nation as a whole—to eliminate unemployment by increasing production, raising wages and therefore living standards, and shortening working hours. Until further progress is made on a Nation-wide scale toward accomplishing these things, such economic trouble spots as the Mexican community in San Antonio will continue to exist.



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# Appendixes

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# Appendix A

## SUPPLEMENTARY TABLES

**Table 1.—Date of Pecan Shellers' Arrival in San Antonio, by Place of Last Residence**

Place of last residence	Total	Date of pecan shellers' arrival				
		1900 or before	1901–1910	1911–1920	1921–1930	1931 or later
Total pecan shellers.....	369	32	67	130	95	45
Percent distribution						
Total.....	100	100	100	100	100	100
Texas, other than San Antonio.....	56	28	39	42	80	93
Other States.....	3	—	—	3	3	7
Mexico.....	41	72	61	55	17	—

NOTE.—Excludes 80 pecan shellers who were natives of San Antonio and 63 whose places of last residence or dates of moving to San Antonio were not ascertainable.

**Table 2.—Pecan Shellers' Reasons for Moving to San Antonio, by Date of Arrival**

Reason for moving to San Antonio	Total	Date of pecan shellers' arrival				
		1900 or before	1901–1910	1911–1920	1921–1930	1931 or later
Total pecan shellers.....	365	35	65	124	97	44
Percent distribution						
Total.....	100	100	100	100	100	100
Economic reasons.....	51	34	37	47	66	63
To look for work.....	41	25	34	33	58	50
To shell pecans.....	2	—	—	—	4	9
To go to work in other industries.....	7	9	3	14	3	2
Other economic reasons.....	1	—	—	—	1	2
Personal reasons.....	49	66	63	53	34	37
Came with relatives or friends.....	28	49	37	34	15	5
Other personal reasons.....	21	17	26	19	19	32

NOTE.—Excludes 80 natives of San Antonio and 67 other persons whose reasons for or dates of moving to San Antonio were not ascertainable.

Table 3.—Size and Composition of Pecan Shellers' Families

Family size	Total	Composition							
		Un-attached	Normal families				Broken families		
			Total	With or without others; no children	With children; no others	With children and others	Total	With children; no others	With others and children
Total families..	512	17	292	41	182	69	158	103	55
			Percent distribution						
Total .....	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
1 person .....	3	100							
2 persons .....	8		8	57			8	12	16
3 persons .....	19		17	29	21		21	22	32
4 persons .....	18		19	7	21	20	18	17	18
5 persons .....	17		17	7	15	27	21	23	18
6 persons .....	11		11	—	12	16	12	12	13
7 persons .....	9		10	—	14	7	8	9	4
8 persons .....	6		7	—	9	4	5	3	4
9 persons .....	3		4	—	4	7	3	2	2
10 persons or more.	6		7	—	4	19	4	—	7

Table 4.—Pecan Shellers' Usual Occupations, by Age and Sex

Usual occupation	Total		Age and sex											
			Under 20 years		20-29 years		30-39 years		40-49 years		50-59 years		60 years and over	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Total pecan shellers .....	324	162	3	6	57	17	81	51	59	44	68	28	56	16
Professional .....	3	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	1	—
Farm owners and tenants .....	3	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	1	—
Store owners and clerks .....	2	1	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Skilled workers and foremen .....	22	—	—	—	1	—	4	—	7	—	5	—	5	—
Semiskilled:														
Pecans .....	93	116	2	6	24	15	20	43	13	34	20	14	14	4
Other .....	6	1	—	—	—	—	4	—	—	—	2	—	—	1
Unskilled:														
Agriculture .....	69	3	—	—	10	—	20	—	11	1	13	2	15	—
Manufacturing .....	107	—	—	—	19	—	25	—	25	—	19	—	19	—
Other industries .....	13	—	—	—	—	—	5	—	2	—	6	—	—	—
Domestic service .....	5	5	—	—	2	—	1	2	1	—	1	3	—	—
Housewife or homemaker .....	1	35	—	—	—	2	—	5	—	9	—	9	1	10
None .....	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—

NOTE.—Excludes 26 persons (13 males and 13 females) whose ages or usual occupations were not ascertainable.

**Table 5.—Average Annual Production of All Pecans and of Seedling Pecans, by State, 1927–1936<sup>1</sup>**

[Thousands of pounds]

State	All varieties	Percent of all	Seedlings only	Percent of seedlings	State	All varieties	Percent of all	Seedlings only	Percent of seedlings
12 States..	61,274	100	46,067	100	Georgia.....	6,670	11	573	1
Texas.....	23,380	39	22,543	48	Alabama.....	2,628	4	357	1
Oklahoma.....	12,520	21	12,286	27	Florida.....	1,367	2	309	1
Louisiana.....	4,327	7	3,395	7	South Carolina..	935	2	156	*
Mississippi.....	4,333	7	2,142	5	North Carolina..	803	1	257	1
Arkansas.....	3,289	5	3,041	7	Missouri.....	870	1	856	2
					Illinois.....	152	*	152	*

\* Less than 0.5 percent.

<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Agricultural Economics. *Production Bulletin*. U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., July 20, 1937.**Table 6.—Production of All Pecans, Seedlings, and Improved Pecans in the United States and Texas, 1919–1938<sup>1</sup>**

[Thousands of pounds]

Year	All varieties			Seedlings			Improved varieties		
	United States	Texas		United States	Texas		United States	Texas	
		Number	Percent		Number	Percent		Number	Percent
1919.....	69,110	35,000	51	62,920	34,750	55	6,190	250	4
1920.....	10,375	2,000	19	8,077	1,980	25	2,298	20	1
1921.....	48,155	19,000	39	40,391	18,880	47	7,764	120	2
1922.....	11,355	2,000	18	7,907	1,980	25	3,448	20	1
1923.....	58,030	20,000	34	47,516	19,800	42	10,514	200	2
1924.....	37,998	12,500	33	30,848	12,380	40	7,150	120	2
1925.....	52,463	12,000	23	40,147	11,870	30	12,316	130	1
1926.....	95,861	41,900	44	78,326	41,060	52	17,535	840	5
1927.....	36,504	9,600	26	26,964	9,410	35	9,540	190	2
1928.....	68,550	29,500	43	50,545	28,700	57	18,005	800	4
1929.....	51,184	21,000	41	41,989	20,410	49	9,195	590	6
1930.....	52,100	13,500	26	38,825	13,100	34	13,275	400	3
1931.....	83,660	35,000	42	62,505	33,810	54	21,155	1,190	6
1932.....	59,330	22,800	38	50,050	22,000	44	9,280	800	9
1933.....	68,830	27,000	39	50,778	25,920	51	18,052	1,080	6
1934.....	46,475	15,000	32	32,695	14,400	44	13,780	600	4
1935.....	105,975	50,000	47	85,390	47,750	56	20,585	2,250	11
1936.....	40,135	10,400	26	20,920	9,930	47	19,205	470	2
1937.....	76,893	27,000	35	53,933	25,750	48	22,960	1,250	5
1938.....	46,566	19,845	43	29,167	18,950	65	17,399	895	5

<sup>1</sup> Based on data furnished by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

**Table 7.—Workers in Families of Pecan Shellers, by Employment and Family Status, 1938**

Family status	Total	Workers employed throughout the year	Unemployed workers		Duration of Unemployment				
			Num-ber	Per-cent	1-29 days	30-59 days	60-89 days	90-149 days	150 days or more
Total workers.....	1,160	175	985	100	4	5	61	9	21
Heads of families.....	445	68	377	100	5	5	71	10	9
Wives or husbands of heads.....	129	8	121	100	2	3	57	5	33
Sons or daughters.....	482	70	412	100	3	5	54	9	29
Other persons.....	104	29	75	100	3	7	50	9	31

**Table 8.—Estimated Consumption of Nuts in the United States, 1937-38 <sup>1</sup>**

Kind of nut	Total production <sup>2</sup>	Imports		Total consumption <sup>3</sup>	Per capita consumption <sup>3</sup>
		Shelled	Unshelled		
Total.....	Million pounds 238.0	Million pounds 43.1	Million pounds 38.8	Million pounds 157.2	Pounds 1.21
Almonds.....	40.0	2.9	*	14.9	0.11
Filberts.....	4.5	2.0	0.2	4.1	0.03
Pecans:					
Improved.....	23.0	*	—	28.8	0.22
Seedling.....	53.9				
Walnuts.....	116.6	4.5	0.3	48.9	0.38
Brazil nuts.....	—	6.4	12.4	12.7	0.10
Cashews.....	—	26.2	—	26.2	0.20
Chestnuts.....	—	—	22.2	18.7	0.14
Pignolias.....	—	0.4	—	0.4	0.01
Pistachios.....	—	0.7	3.7	2.5	0.02
Peanuts.....	865.0	4.5	0.5	581.0	4.48

\* Less than 0.05.

<sup>1</sup> Based on data furnished by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. August-July year for all nuts except peanuts; July-June year for peanuts.<sup>2</sup> Unshelled basis.<sup>3</sup> Shelled basis.

**Table 9.—Families of Pecan Shellers, by Total Income and Type of Work History, 1938**

Total family income in 1938	Total	Type of family work history in 1938						
		Nonmigratory			Migratory			
		Total	Pecan work only	Pecans and other	Total	Pecans and beets	Pecans and cotton	Pecans, beets, and cotton
Total families.....	510	393	210	183	117	21	82	14
Percent distribution								
Total.....	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	†
Less than \$100.....	5	6	10	1	2	—	2	—
\$100-\$199.....	30	33	42	22	21	10	24	†
\$200-\$299.....	28	26	28	24	32	10	36	†
\$300-\$399.....	13	11	10	12	19	19	21	†
\$400-\$499.....	8	8	5	11	8	23	5	—
\$500-\$599.....	6	5	1	11	8	10	7	†
\$600-\$699.....	4	4	2	5	6	14	5	—
\$700-\$799.....	3	4	1	7	—	—	—	—
\$800-\$899.....	1	1	1	2	2	10	—	—
\$900-\$999.....	1	1	—	2	—	—	—	—
\$1,000 and more.....	1	1	—	3	2	4	—	†

†Percent not calculated on base of less than 20.

NOTE.—Excludes two families whose total incomes in 1938 were not ascertainable.

**Table 10.—Average Weekly Incomes and Hours Reported by Workers in Families of Pecan Shellers, by Type of Work, 1938**

Type of work	Number of jobs <sup>1</sup>	Percent	Average weekly income per worker <sup>2</sup>	Average weekly hours per worker <sup>3</sup>
Total.....	1, 154	100	\$3. 01	51
Professional service.....	4	*	†	†
Proprietary, managerial, and official.....	5	*	†	†
Clerical.....	9	1	†	†
Skilled.....	19	2	4. 06	44
Semiskilled.....	749	65	2. 87	51
Pecan.....	680	59	2. 73	51
Picking.....	604	52	2. 59	51
Cracking.....	62	6	4. 48	53
Other.....	14	1	5. 04	53
Other manufacturing.....	53	5	7. 14	39
Other semiskilled.....	16	1	4. 90	51
Unskilled.....	368	32	3. 36	49
Agriculture.....	161	14	3. 50	61
Cotton.....	105	9	3. 22	60
Beet.....	22	2	4. 90	64
Other.....	34	3	4. 20	57
Other industries.....	154	13	3. 64	39
Domestic and personal service.....	53	5	2. 24	46

\*Less than 0.5 percent.

†Average not computed for fewer than 10 persons.

<sup>1</sup> Jobs are on a family basis; several workers in one family may have held only one job in a given industry.  
<sup>2</sup> Average (median) signifies that for half of the (family) jobs in each occupation, income per worker was higher than the figure given, and for the other half income per worker was lower; duration of jobs was not taken into account.

<sup>3</sup> Computed on basis of 987 jobs; weekly hours per worker not ascertainable in the cases of 177 jobs. Medians subject to same qualifications as those in preceding column.

NOTE.—Excludes 10 jobs, the income from which was not ascertainable.

**Table 11.—Duration of Jobs and Number of Workers per Job in Families of Pecan Shellers, by Selected Types of Work, 1938**

Type of work	Number of jobs	Average <sup>1</sup> duration of jobs (days)	Average number of workers on job
Total .....	1, 154	206	1. 5
Semiskilled:			
Pecan .....	680	242	1. 5
Other manufacturing .....	53	319	1. 0
Unskilled:			
Agriculture:			
Cotton .....	105	63	2. 6
Beets .....	22	189	2. 6
Manufacturing .....	132	147	1. 0
Domestic and personal service .....	53	143	1. 0

<sup>1</sup> Median.

NOTE.—Excludes 10 jobs for which information was not ascertainable.

**Table 12.—Families of Pecan Shellers, by Family Size and Number of Workers, 1938**

Family size	Total families		Families with—				
	Number	Percent	1 worker	2 workers	3 workers	4 workers	5 workers or more
Total families .....	512	100	32	35	19	8	6
1 person .....	17	100	100				
2 persons .....	43	100	51	49			
3 persons .....	97	100	35	45	20		
4 persons .....	91	100	41	41	14	4	
5 persons .....	89	100	28	30	28	11	3
6 persons .....	54	100	20	31	28	17	4
7 persons .....	45	100	27	32	27	7	7
8 persons .....	29	100	17	39	17	17	10
9 persons .....	17	†	†	†	†	†	†
10 persons or more .....	30	100	—	13	17	13	57

†Percent not calculated on base of less than 20.



**Table 13.—Family Income and Migratory Status of Pecan Shellers' Families, by Number of Workers per Family, 1938**

Total family income in 1938	Total	Families with—				
		1 worker	2 workers	3 workers	4 workers	5 workers or more
Total families.....	510	166	179	95	40	30
Percent distribution						
Total.....	100	100	100	100	100	100
Less than \$100.....	5	14	1	—	—	—
\$100-\$199.....	30	61	23	8	5	3
\$200-\$299.....	28	20	42	22	17	10
\$300-\$399.....	13	4	14	25	22	10
\$400-\$499.....	8	1	8	16	15	10
\$500-\$599.....	6	—	5	16	3	17
\$600-\$699.....	4	—	3	5	10	23
\$700-\$799.....	3	—	2	5	12	3
\$800-\$899.....	1	—	1	2	5	7
\$900-\$999.....	1	—	—	—	3	10
\$1,000 or more.....	1	—	1	1	8	7
Average <sup>1</sup> family income.....	\$251	\$159	\$259	\$381	\$425	\$600
Nonmigratory families:						
Number.....	393	146	148	70	23	6
Average <sup>1</sup> family income.....	\$238	\$155	\$259	\$425	\$675	†
Migratory families:						
Number.....	117	20	31	25	17	24
Average <sup>1</sup> family income.....	\$285	\$185	\$258	\$293	\$308	\$533

†Average not computed for fewer than 10 cases.

<sup>1</sup> Median, based on more detailed distribution than that given in table.

NOTE.—Excludes 2 families whose total incomes in 1938 were not ascertainable.

**Table 14.—Average Family Income From Pecan Work Only, by Number of Workers per Family With Pecan Jobs, 1938**

Number of persons in family employed at pecan work	Number of families	Percent distribution	Average <sup>1</sup> income
Total.....	512	100	\$148
1 worker.....	260	51	109
2 workers.....	179	35	192
3 workers.....	52	10	286
4 workers.....	12	2	375
5 workers or more.....	9	2	†

†Average not computed for fewer than 10 cases.

<sup>1</sup> Median. Excludes 4 families whose incomes in 1938 were not ascertainable.

**Table 15.—Pecan Shellers' Average Family Income From Migratory Work Only, by Number of Workers per Family With Migratory Jobs, 1938**

Number of persons in family employed at migratory work	Number of families	Percent distribution	Average <sup>1</sup> income
Total.....	118	100	\$92
1 worker.....	44	37	70
2 workers.....	24	20	74
3 workers.....	22	19	124
4 workers.....	12	10	112
5 workers or more.....	16	14	199

<sup>1</sup> Median.**Table 16.—Pecan Shellers' Average Family Income From Miscellaneous Nonmigratory Work Only, by Number of Workers per Family With Such Jobs, 1938**

Number of persons in family employed at miscellaneous nonmigratory work	Number of families	Percent distribution	Average <sup>1</sup> income
Total.....	229	100	\$139
1 worker.....	181	79	97
2 workers.....	41	18	262
3 workers or more.....	7	3	†

†Average not computed for fewer than 10 cases.

<sup>1</sup> Median.

NOTE.—Excludes 6 families whose incomes from nonmigratory work were not ascertainable.

**Table 17.—Family Incomes From Pecan Work Only, by Total Time Spent at Such Work, 1938**

Income from pecan work	Total	Total time spent in pecan work by all workers participating				
		Less than 200 days	200-249 days	250-299 days	300-349 days	350 days or more
Total families.....	508	54	36	123	67	228
Total.....	100	Percent distribution				
		100	100	100	100	100
Less than \$100.....	24	93	53	23	28	4
\$100-\$199.....	44	7	44	61	68	35
\$200-\$299.....	22	—	3	14	3	39
\$300-\$399.....	5	—	—	1	1	11
\$400-\$499.....	3	—	—	1	—	5
\$500-\$599.....	1	—	—	—	—	2
\$600-\$699.....	1	—	—	—	—	3
\$700-\$799.....	*	—	—	—	—	1
\$800 or more.....	*	—	—	—	—	*
Average <sup>1</sup> family income from pecan work.....	\$148	\$40	\$98	\$130	\$112	\$219

\*Less than 0.5 percent.

<sup>1</sup> Median, based on more detailed distribution than that given in table.

NOTE.—Excludes 4 families whose incomes from pecan work in 1938 were not ascertainable.

**Table 18.—Pecan Shellers' Family Incomes From Migratory Work Only, by Total Time Spent at Such Work, 1938**

Income from migratory work	Total	Total time spent in migratory work by all workers participating			
		Less than 100 days	100-199 days	200-349 days	350 days or more
Total migratory families.....	118	35	31	24	28
Percent distribution					
Total.....	100	100	100	100	100
Less than \$50.....	23	54	23	—	4
\$50-\$99.....	31	46	41	34	—
\$100-\$149.....	12	—	13	25	14
\$150-\$199.....	13	—	10	25	21
\$200-\$249.....	8	—	3	8	26
\$250-\$299.....	3	—	10	4	—
\$300-\$349.....	3	—	—	—	14
\$350-\$399.....	3	—	—	4	7
\$400-\$449.....	2	—	—	—	7
\$450-\$499.....	—	—	—	—	—
\$500 or more.....	2	—	—	—	7
Average <sup>1</sup> family income from migratory work...	\$92	\$47	\$81	\$120	\$218

<sup>1</sup> Median, based on more detailed distribution than that given in table.**Table 19.—Pecan Shellers' Family Incomes From Miscellaneous Nonmigratory Work Only, by Total Time Spent at Such Work, 1938**

Income from miscellaneous nonmigratory work	Total	Total time spent in miscellaneous nonmigratory work by all workers participating			
		Less than 100 days	100-199 days	200-349 days	350 days or more
Total families.....	229	57	31	40	101
Percent distribution					
Total.....	100	100	100	100	100
Less than \$100.....	44	96	68	22	15
\$100-\$199.....	16	4	16	25	18
\$200-\$299.....	14	—	13	37	14
\$300-\$399.....	10	—	3	13	16
\$400-\$499.....	8	—	—	—	18
\$500-\$599.....	4	—	—	3	9
\$600-\$699.....	1	—	—	—	3
\$700-\$799.....	1	—	—	—	2
\$800-\$899.....	—	—	—	—	—
\$900-\$999.....	1	—	—	—	2
\$1,000 or more.....	1	—	—	—	3
Average <sup>1</sup> family income from miscellaneous nonmigratory work.....	\$139	\$17	\$69	\$212	\$310

<sup>1</sup> Median, based on more detailed distribution than that given in table.

NOTE.—Excludes 6 families whose incomes from nonmigratory work were not ascertainable.

**Table 20.—School Attendance and Age of Youth, by Migratory and Nonmigratory Families of Pecan Shellers, 1938**

Age <sup>1</sup> and family type	Total		School attendance in 1938			
	Number	Percent	Did not attend	1-24 weeks	25-35 weeks	Full time, 36 weeks
Total.....	833	100	38	6	1	55
Children in migratory families.....	211	100	44	9	5	42
7-10 years.....	56	100	27	18	5	50
11-13 years.....	50	100	22	12	4	62
14-18 years.....	105	100	63	4	5	28
Children in nonmigratory families.....	622	100	36	5	—	59
7-10 years.....	188	100	21	7	—	72
11-13 years.....	166	100	11	4	—	85
14-18 years.....	268	100	64	3	—	33

<sup>1</sup> Age as of last birthday.

NOTE.—Excludes 34 children whose school records in 1938 were not ascertainable.

**Table 21.—Schooling Completed by Youth in Families of Pecan Shellers, by Age, 1938**

Age <sup>1</sup>	Total		Schooling completed				Average <sup>2</sup> number of years
	Number	Percent	None	1-5 years	6-8 years	9-11 years	
Total.....	849	100	10	73	16	1	3.8
7 years.....	61	100	48	52	—	—	1.1
8 years.....	59	100	19	81	—	—	1.7
9 years.....	77	100	14	86	—	—	2.3
10 years.....	59	100	8	90	2	—	2.7
11 years.....	76	100	5	91	4	—	3.5
12 years.....	77	100	3	93	4	—	4.0
13 years.....	66	100	3	74	23	—	4.9
14 years.....	81	100	2	70	28	—	5.4
15 years.....	68	100	3	65	32	—	5.4
16 years.....	69	100	4	60	32	4	5.3
17 years.....	74	100	9	62	26	3	4.9
18 years.....	82	100	5	62	29	4	5.2

<sup>1</sup> Age as of last birthday.<sup>2</sup> Median, based on more detailed distribution than that given in table.

NOTE.—Excludes 18 persons whose years of schooling completed were not ascertainable.

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