

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

“THE FARM ISSUE”

1974 – Denominational Resolution



This section, as well as the full text, comes from the denomination's website:

<http://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1974farmissue.html>.

“III. The Case of Growers, Crew Leaders, and Farm Workers

*If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him ... let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth.”—
1 John 3:17-18*

We hear much today about grower-farm worker conflicts and a labor system that seems to have engulfed both growers and farm workers. All major religious faiths are concerned. Some clergymen are giving their full time to this.

We owe much to growers who provide for us a rich supply of quality fruits and vegetables at a moderate cost. They do this by hard work and taking risks such as frost, flood, plant diseases, insect pests and falling prices. We realize that many growers aim to treat their workers well. However, we as consumers have been silent under a system that tends to exploit people and blight their lives. The University of Florida Law Review, after an objective study of the migrant farm worker situation, has concluded:

"The most economically and socially deprived segment of the population in the United States consists of those persons generally referred to as migrant farm workers. There are approximately 276,000 adult male migrant workers in the United States. Including women and children there are around one million people who migrate."

These people are caught in a system that is subject to many abuses such as poor housing, lack of education, inadequate health services, and exploitation by crew leaders.

For more than thirty years farm workers have been striving to form an organization as a means for collective bargaining, in order to improve their working and living conditions. They desire most of all to liberate themselves from the crew leader system and other injustices that occur because they are a weak and scattered people without power to bargain collectively. Currently using nonviolent methods, their dedicated leader Cesar Chavez is leading them in a renewed effort for liberation. What should be the role of the Church toward the efforts of these people in their struggle? These are our *recommendations*:

To Government that:

1. there be published a summary of legislation enacted in behalf of the farm workers.
2. support and staff be provided to enforce laws already in existence in regard to housing, minimum wages, schooling for children, and registration and regulation of crew leaders.
3. new laws be enacted to provide for farm workers the minimum wage standards and unemployment protection that are available to most industrial workers.
4. farm workers be given a voice in the administration of welfare programs so that these programs become a means for rehabilitation and human development rather than demeaning handouts from the rich to the poor.
5. farm workers be given the right to free ballot elections to determine who will be representing them in collective bargaining.

To Growers that:

1. both growers and farm workers recognize the need for improvement in management-labor relations and for collective bargaining in good faith.
2. the crew leader system be recognized as outdated and be replaced by direct negotiation with workers.
3. they seek to educate the general public as to their own problems and those of the workers, instead of spending large sums to curb the organization and the rise of farm workers.
4. growers seek ways to use their unique position and power to help improve a situation whose solution will be to the advantage of all.

To Farm Workers that:

1. in local areas they take constructive measures to present their problems to the general public, using the press, television and radio.
2. they participate in cooperative associations for credit, education, housing, and more stable employment.
3. wherever grower-worker contracts exist, farm workers should make every possible effort for prompt and efficient servicing.
4. workers in collective bargaining refrain from efforts to prevent farm families and operators from working on their own farm.

To the Church that:

1. efforts be made to acquaint members with the problems of growers, farm workers and their own responsibilities as consumers.
2. members support the enactment and enforcement of legislation to provide for farm workers the same standards of safety, wages, employment insurance and other services that are available to other workers.
3. it provide qualified volunteers and more adequate financial support to ministries for self-development of farm and migrant workers.
4. it support local projects such as housing, credit unions, training, and employment opportunities for families wishing to settle out of the migrant stream.
5. its members consider seriously and prayerfully whether they can use the products of producers who reject collective bargaining relationships with any bona fide association of farm workers.

6. it commend farm workers, growers and owners committed to nonviolence in their struggle for justice.
7. where relief supplies are given, they be given in response to an emergency need, and as far as possible, in cooperation with agencies of farm workers.
8. its members and congregations develop effective ways to relate to farm workers when they come into the community; and make sure that our churches, schools, and other institutions are open to them.”