

Focus on Cucumbers

Ramiro Sarabia, FLOC Organizer

"When I first came to the US, in December 1969, I went to Florida. I picked strawberries, oranges, and that's all I think. Then I moved to Ohio, and I picked cucumbers. In July, because I didn't have any papers, they had me arrested and took me to Mexico, so I went back to Mexico for one week I think, and then I came back again. My wife was born in the United States, and at that time I had my wife and three kids in Texas, so I had to come back. I worked in Texas, for three months, and then I went back again to Florida, and worked with oranges and tomatoes.

"In 1972, in October, we decided to come to Ohio and try to find a job.... I found a job in 1974 in a factory, and that's where I worked for twenty years. Part-time, I worked in the pickles, in the afternoons. In 1994, I got laid off; they closed the plant. I had been working with the church, with the migrants, for ten years. When the plant closed, I didn't want to go to another factory. I said 'it's good enough working twenty years in a factory.'

"In 1996, I [met] Baldemar Velásquez, the president of the FLOC. I'd been living for twenty-five years in Ohio, forty miles apart from Baldemar Velásquez, and I never got a chance to meet him. But this time, a guy invited me to go to the office of FLOC, and I said 'yeah, ok, I'd like to know this guy.' ...So we started talking, and [Velásquez] said 'well why don't you work for me?' I said 'doing what?' He said

continued on page 2

Facts about Cucumbers

- ◆ North Carolina grows more cucumbers and produces more pickles than any other state except Michigan. *Whitlock*
- ◆ In 1998, 18,200 acres of North Carolina land was planted with cucumbers to be made into pickles. 17,500 acres were harvested, yielding a total of 79,000 tons of pre-processed cucumbers. *NCDA&CS, Vegetables*
- ◆ Of the migrant farmworkers who work in North Carolina during peak harvest season, more than 7,000 spend at least some time picking cucumbers. *Whitlock*
- ◆ In 1997, the average farm in North Carolina made a \$61,598 profit. This was more than twice the net profit of the average farm nationwide, which earned only \$24,210 profit. *NCDA&CS, Cash Receipts*
- ◆ The total value of the 1998 North Carolina crop of processed cucumbers was \$17,325,000. This was \$1.1 million more than was made on the same crop in 1997. *NCDA&CS, Vegetables*
- ◆ The mean annual personal income for migrant farmworkers in the Southeast is between \$5000 - \$7000. Farmworkers working for growers who contract with the Mount Olive Pickle Company earn only one-quarter as much as workers in the Midwest who are represented by a FLOC union contract. *Endorsement*
- ◆ The nine states which produce the greatest amount of processed cucumbers are California, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Oregon, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. In 1994, 82,600 acres of cucumbers were planted in those states alone. *NCDA&CS, Pesticides*
- ◆ In the nine major growers' states, farmers use six different "restricted use" pesticides: Carbofuran, Esfenvalerate, Ethoprop, Methomyl, Permethrin, and Dichloropropene. A total of 149,200 pounds of these chemicals were applied to processed cucumber crops in the major states in 1994. *NCDA&CS, Pesticides*

Also in this Issue . . .

Farmworker Unions Strive for Change.....	3
Organizing the Least Unionized State in the U.S.....	4
How You Can Support FLOC.....	4
Resources.....	5
Notes From the Field.....	5
Alumni Updates.....	6
SAF Thanks Our Donors.....	6
Get Involved with SAF.....	6

