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Article Summary: In the 1920s a congressional committee investigated the use of child labor in the Nebraska beet fields. This article reproduces the committee's 1923 "Family Study," which found that more than half of all contract beet laborers were under sixteen years of age.

Cataloging Information:

Nebraska sugar beet factory sites: Grand Island, Norfolk, Ames, Scottsbluff, Gering, Bayard, Mitchell, Minatare, Lyman

Keywords: North Platte Valley, sugar beets, Great Western Sugar Company, American Sugar Company, contract labor, hand work, Germans from Russia, Mexicans, National Child Labor Committee, housing

Photographs / Images: map of the North Platte Valley; Table 1: relation between age of child workers 5-15 years old and number of acres worked; Table 2: relation between age of workers 16 and older and number of acres worked; Table 3: relation between age of child workers and number of seasons worked; shack for beet workers; graph showing the number of workers in relation to their age; Table 4: children doing hand work arranged by age groups and processes worked; Table 5: nationalities of contract workers and growers; Table 6: relation of age groups to number and percentage of acres worked (based on a group of 279 hand workers); Table 7: relation of number of acres worked by contract labor families to number of persons in household over age 5; Table 8: relation of age groups to number and percentage of acres worked (based on a group of 1,634 hand workers); Table 9: relationship between worker age and earnings; a frame cottage for workers; shelters near stagnant water (2 views); list showing relation between number of rooms in workers' lodging and number of families per lodging unit; tar paper shack for workers; adobe structures for workers at Scottsbluff (2 views); list showing where the families had been living when they made their first trip to the beet fields; information from Report of Taxation of Foreigners in Scottsbluff District

CHILDREN IN THE SUGAR BEET FIELDS OF THE NORTH PLATTE VALLEY OF NEBRASKA, 1923

By Sara A. Brown and Robie O. Sargent

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Interest in the cultivation of sugar beets developed in Nebraska during the late 1880s. Hall County soil was analyzed to determine its suitability for growing beets, and in 1888 beets grown there from French and German seed were found to have a high sugar content. One of the first commercially successful beet sugar factories in the United States was established at Grand Island in 1890.¹ The state offered bounties for the production of beet sugar, and other factories were soon established — at Norfolk in 1891 and at Ames in 1899² — to process beets raised by area farmers.

In the spring of 1908 the Great Western Sugar Company began raising sugar beets in the irrigated regions of the North Platte Valley. By 1910 sufficient beets were being grown to require a factory for processing, and the Ames facility was moved to Scottsbluff and enlarged. Eventually five additional factories were built at sites in the North Platte Valley: Gering, 1916; Bayard, 1917; Mitchell, 1920; Minatare, 1926; and Lyman, 1927.³ Both the number of acres planted to sugar beets and the yield per acre increased during these years. In 1905 about 250 acres of sugar beets were grown with an average yield of seven tons per acre. By 1922 88,000 acres were produced with an average of 12.12 tons per acre.⁴

Sugar beet culture required a great deal of unskilled handwork, most of which was done by contract laborers. Beet growers generally hired their workers through a field man, who represented a beet sugar factory and who also contracted with the grower for the production of a certain area of beets to be delivered to the factory at a stipulated price per ton.⁵ Various immigrant groups, including Germans from Russia and Mexicans, labored in the Nebraska sugar beet fields, young children often assisting their parents and older brothers and sisters.

It was the child labor involved in sugar beet culture that drew the unfavorable attention of the National Child Labor Committee. Established in 1904, the committee was chartered by Congress in 1907 to promote the welfare of America's working children. By 1911 its membership had grown from less than fifty people to more than 5,000. It had twenty-seven state and local affiliates.⁶ The committee, which included on its board of trustees such prominent Americans as Jane Addams, John Dewey, and Lillian D. Wald, investigated and publicized child labor in various states and industries and successfully spearheaded the drive for state legislation regulating or prohibiting child labor. The published report of its seventh annual conference, held in Philadelphia in 1911, described the committee as cooperating with "educators, medical experts, jurists, reform agencies, relief societies, woman's clubs, trade unions, manufacturers' organizations, churches, and all agencies working for the protection of child life."⁷

In 1923 committee representatives Sara A. Brown and Robie O. Sargent investigated the use of child labor in the sugar beet fields of the North Platte valley. They found that more than half of all contract beet laborers working in this area in 1923 were under sixteen years of age and that nearly one third of these workers not yet sixteen were under ten years of age. Their findings, published in 1924 by the National Child Labor Committee, indicated that the child workers "lose weeks from the public schools" and recommended strict enforcement of the compulsory school attendance law as well as absolute prohibition of the "employment of children under 12 years of age as contract laborers."⁸ The following, termed by Brown and Sargent the "family study," is excerpted from their report, a copy of which is on file at the Nebraska State Historical Society. The original also included sections on local school accommodations for child beet workers ("Child Workers and the School") and statistical summaries of major findings. The spelling and punctuation of the authors have been retained.

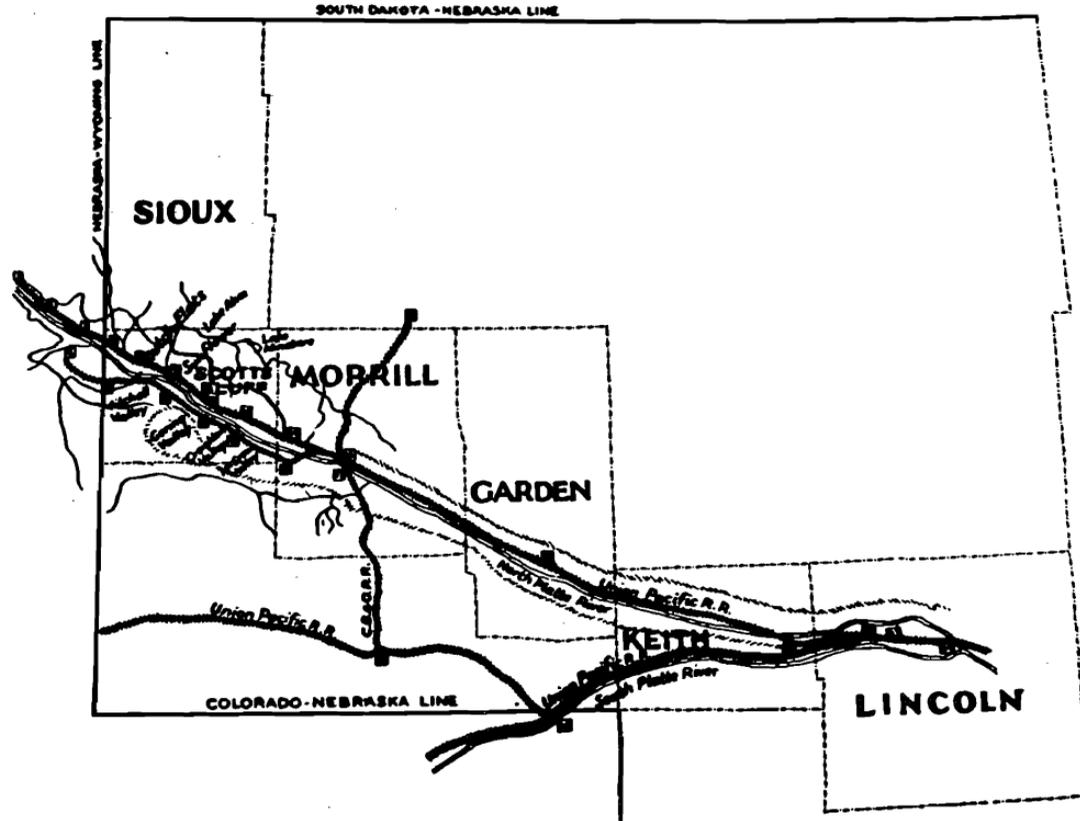
AUTHORS' REPORT

This is a report based upon facts obtained by a study of the children of contract labor families working in the sugar beet fields of Nebraska in 1923. Its purpose is to state impartially, accurately and without personal opinion, conditions under which children worked, lived, and went or failed to go to school; to place in the hands of all those interested in and responsible for them, information upon which to base an opinion, in order that practical means may be formulated for adjusting the kind and amount of work to each child according to his age, his right to education, play, and freedom from responsibility for the support of his family. Childhood never returns.

THE NORTH PLATTE VALLEY

- Rivers
- Irrigation Canals
- Railroads
- State Lines
- County Lines
- Sand Hills
- Towns

- 1 - Ft. Laramie
- 2 - Lingle
- 3 - Torrington
- 4 - Henry
- 5 - Morrill
- 6 - Cottier
- 7 - Lyman
- 8 - Haig
- 9 - Mitchell
- 10 - Scottsbluff
- 11 - Gering
- 12 - Minatare
- 13 - Nelbeta
- 14 - Bayard
- 15 - Chimney Rock
- 16 - Northport
- 17 - Bridgeport
- 18 - Oshkosh
- 19 - Sidney
- 20 - Julesburg
- 21 - Sarben
- 22 - O'Fallon
- 23 - Harshey
- 24 - North Platte
- 25 - Leton



MAP OF TERRITORY COVERED

A Map of the North Platte Valley, Showing the Location of the Counties of this Study, Scotts Bluff, Morrill, and Lincoln Counties.

In the irrigated districts along the Platte River, sugar beets have been grown for about thirty-three years, and along the North Platte for about twenty years. Beginning at Grand Island on the east, the crop has followed the Platte for approximately 144 miles to where the North and South Platte Rivers unite just east of the city of North Platte in Lincoln County; thence it has continued along the North Platte for about 185 miles and across the state line for about eighteen miles to Lingle, Wyoming.

There are five beet sugar factories in the state, owned by two sugar companies. The factory built in 1890 at Grand Island is said to have been the first commercially successful beet sugar factory in the United States. It has always been a comparatively small plant owned by the American Sugar Company. It handled beets from about 6,000 acres in 1923.

Three factories are located in Scotts Bluff County and one in Morrill County. The largest of these, located at Scottsbluff, was built in 1910. The one at Gering was erected in 1916 and that at Mitchell in 1920. The factory at Bayard, Morrill County, was built in 1917. There is an unfinished plant at Minatare in Scotts Bluff County. All these belong to the Great Western Sugar Company and in 1923 handled beets from about 50,000 acres.

The two companies have agreed upon a territorial line which falls between Hershey and O'Fallons in Lincoln County. While not arbitrary, it is said to prevent overlapping in such matters as supervision and shipment of beets to the factory. The American Sugar Company ships beets east to the Grand Island factory from Hershey and points east as far as Grand Island. The Great Western ships west from O'Fallons and points northwest as far as the state line and on to Barnes, about five miles west of Lingle, Wyoming.

The districts selected for this study all lie within the North Platte Valley and are located in Scotts Bluff, Morrill, Lincoln, Keith and Sioux Counties. They were selected after consultation with state and county officials and after a careful examination of Table 29, Bulletin No. 123 Agricultural Statistics of Nebraska for the year 1922, referred to as the "crop report"; of the assessors' returns for Scotts Bluff and Morrill Counties, 1922; and of Map No. 18318A North Platte Project, Wyoming-Nebraska, issued by the U.S. Reclamation Service, referred to as the "irrigation map." The crop report showed that the total sugar beet acreage for the state was 55,918. Scotts Bluff County had 33,368 acres, Morrill County 9,581, and Lincoln County 3,626 acres, making a total of 46,575 acres for the three counties. The assessors' returns gave the distribution of the acreage in these counties according to smaller units, known as precincts. From these returns was secured the approximate number of acres and number of farmers growing beets in each precinct. The irrigation map indicated the boundaries of irrigated

valleys, and to a large extent the roads leading through them. The only portions of Keith and Sioux Counties covered were those valleys continuing across the Lincoln and Scotts Bluff county line: in Keith County, the Sarben valley; and in Sioux, the "Dutch Flats." Following along the North Platte valley as it crossed the state line from Scotts Bluff County, there were included a dozen families from Lincoln who lived and worked in Goshen County, Wyoming.

In order to secure all of the information desired, it was necessary to make at least two personal visits upon the children. One was made in the homes where they lived with their parents near the beet fields, or out in the field where they were at work, and is referred to as the Family Study. The other was made to the schools in which they belonged in the beet districts, or in the cities to which they moved at the end of the beet season, and is referred to as the School Study.

In the family study, facts bearing on the family and work life of each child were secured through conversation with one or both of the parents and with the children. By way of introduction, parents were given the name of the agent and a brief explanation of what information was desired. As the conversation proceeded, information thus secured was noted in their presence in regular form on family schedules. This, together with conditions noted from observation and further inquiry, furnished the data for this report of the children's family and work life.

In the school study, information was secured for children of the family study from public school records through the assistance of school officials and teachers and by personal visits to many schools. At the same time records were obtained for other children belonging to the same schools who lost time on account of beets. The study included rural schools in districts where children lived during the beet season. When they were permanent residents of the district, records secured covered the full school period for the beet season. When they were permanent residents of any other school district, records were taken only for the time the family was known to have remained in the rural district. Later, visits were made to the schools of their permanent homes and records completed for the full school period. When children had no permanent homes, records were taken only for the time the family was known to have remained in the rural district. Every effort was made to follow them after they moved from the beet district and to complete their records. The study included, for both the rural and city schools, the total school days in the fall term to the date for which each record was taken. For the city schools, it included in addition the number of school days lost when children left for the beet fields in the spring. All complete records thus secured furnished the data for this report of the children's age-grade and school attendance.

The visiting of children in their homes was begun June 18th in Scotts Bluff County, and visiting the schools was finished December 20th in the city of Lincoln. The field work of the family study required fifteen weeks, distributed over the entire beet season when the major part of all the hand work was being done. It was started June 18th when bunching and trimming were well under way, and continued through the summer during weeding and hoeing until September 6th. It was resumed October 15th when harvest – pulling and topping – was on, and was closed November 15th near the end of the harvest. The field work of the school study required four weeks. It was started November 20th in Morrill County and the last records were taken December 20th in the city of Lincoln.

Certain words and terms used frequently in this report are here defined for the sake of clarity. 1. "Children" – those under sixteen years of age, except where the context clearly indicates otherwise. 2. "Young persons" – those from sixteen to twenty years of age inclusive. 3. "Adults" – persons twenty-one years of age and over. 4. "Beet district" – a geographic section of the valley where sugar beets are grown. 5. "Shack" a cheaply-built, unfinished, unceiled shelter of one, two or three rooms, often covered with tar paper or building paper. 6. "Urban migrant" – one who leaves a city, town, or village and goes to the open country to work. 7. "Rural migrant" – one who goes from a farm or hamlet to work. 8. "Grower" – a farmer who grows the beet crop, that is, plants, cultivates, lifts and hauls. 9. "Contract labor" – labor which contracts with a grower to do the hand work in beets. 10. "Hand work" – processes done by hand. 11. "Cultivation" – processes done by horse-drawn cultivator. 12. "Company" – any beet sugar company contracting with growers. 13. "City" – population 5,000 or more. 14. "Town" – population 2,500 to 5,000. 15. "Village" – population 200-2,500. 16. "Hamlet" – population less than 200. . . .

CHILD WORKERS AND THE FAMILY

Children Working – "Sure, he wouldn't be tending beets if he didn't," was the prompt reply of a grower when asked if his contract labor family had children who worked in the beet field. Another, when asked if he knew of families whose children helped, said, "Well, *everybody* in our valley has beets and *all* the children work." These men expressed a matter of common knowledge; that is, that children *do hand work* in the beet fields of Nebraska. The State Department of Public Welfare in its report for the biennium closing June 30, 1922 (p. 57), says, "The beet sugar work of our state involves the greatest number of children of any child industry in Nebraska."

A child works in the beet field when his father contracts with a grower to do all the hand work on a specified number of acres; or when

his father does the hand work on his own crop grown on land which he either owns or rents; or when his father is a hired man doing a variety of work on a farm where beets are grown. In rare instances a child may work independently of his parents, associating himself with a family doing hand work.

The child workers of this study belong to 355 families who were visited where they lived and worked during the beet season of 1923; 262 were in Scotts Bluff County; 50 in Morrill County; 15 in Lincoln County; 10 in Sioux; 6 in Keith; and 12 families from Lincoln were in Goshen County, Wyoming. The 355 families did all the hand work on 16,984 acres of beets, an average of 47.8 acres per family. Of the number, 297 were contract labor families who worked 15,030 acres and 58 were grower families who did their own hand work on 1,954 acres.

Families were selected who had children *under 16 years* of age doing hand work in beets. It was the purpose to visit *all* contract labor families in the districts covered who had workers within this age limit. In addition, families of growers who did *all* their own hand work were sought out and visited in several representative districts. Living and working in the same districts with these families were groups of adult contract laborers and also growers who used their own children to do only a part of their acreage, contracting for the rest. These were not included in the study.

In course of conversation with the family, names and ages of all the children were noted with information as to which ones worked beets and which did not. In order to determine what part of the family-acreage was worked by the children of different ages, parents were asked to compute the number of acres their children worked during the season. With the possible exception of ten or a dozen, parents knew very definitely. In fact, before contracting to do the hand work on a specified number of acres, they had estimated the total acreage the family would be able to do upon their knowledge of what could be expected from each worker. If they had met with any disappointment in the matter, it was in not securing as large an acreage as they wanted rather than in contracting for more than the family was able to work.

The computations secured in this way were strikingly uniform, although the families often lived a hundred miles or more apart, were not acquainted with each other and had no means of communication on the subject. For those children whose parents did not have personal experience or knowledge upon which to base the information, the same items were carefully computed with the parents, using as a basis experiences common to all the other families. Such information was used to determine the number of acres worked by the children of different age groups and is given in this report as thoroughly reliable, unbiased and as accurate as it was possible to secure.

In 355 families there were 995 children under 16 years of age working beets in the season of 1923. According to the computation of their parents, they worked 7,995.5 acres, an average of 8 acres per child. In number these children comprised 52 percent of *all* the hand workers, who did *all* the hand work on the 16,984 acres of this study. They worked 47 percent of the acreage. Nearly one-third were under 10 years of age, and slightly more than two-thirds were from 10 to 15 years inclusive

TABLE 1

Age Group	1 Number of child workers	2 Percent- age of 995	3 Percentage of all hand workers	4 Number of acres worked	5 Percentage worked of the total acreage	6 Average acres worked by each child
5-9 years	303	30.5	16.0	1,823	11.0	6.0
10-15 years	692	69.5	36.0	6,172.5	36.0	8.7
5-15 years	995	100.0	52.0	7,995.5	47.0	8.0

Working alongside the 995 children of the same 16,984 acres, there were 918 persons over 16 years of age, 573 of whom were parents. According to the parents' computation these 918 persons worked 8,988.5 acres, an average of 9.7 per person. In number, this group comprised 48 percent of all the hand workers and did 53 percent of the total acreage. More than one-fourth were young persons from 16 to 20 years inclusive, and less than three-fourths were adults 21 years and over

TABLE 2

Age Group	1 Number of workers	2 Percent- age of 918	3 Percentage of all hand workers	4 Number of acres worked	5 Percentage worked of the total acreage	6 Average acres worked by each
16-20 yrs.	241	26.0	12.5	2,591.5	16.0	10.7
21 yrs. and over	677	74.0	35.5	6,397	37.0	9.4
16 and over	918	100.0	48.0	8,988.5	53.0	9.7

Considering Tables 1 and 2 together, the significant fact is that of the 1,913 persons doing all the hand work on 16,984 acres of sugar beets, 995 or 52 percent were children under 16 years of age, who did 47 percent of the hand work.

Age of Child Workers — How old were the child workers? How many seasons had they worked? At what age did they begin? Again it was the

children's parents who gave information. On page 265 is shown the distribution according to age of 1,236 hand workers under twenty-one years of age, 995 child workers (under 16 years) and 241 young persons (16-20 years).

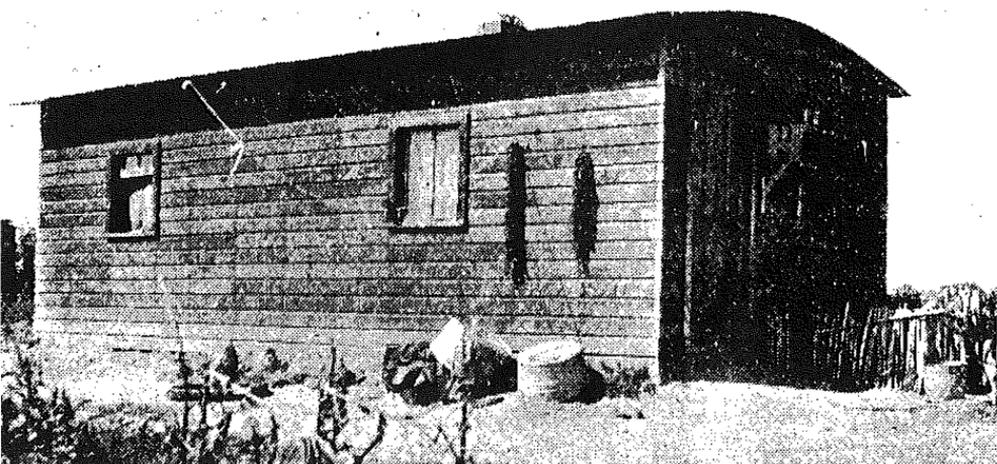
Children as young as seven years of age worked. There were sixteen who were under seven. From the age of seven the number of each year steadily increased up to twelve. From twelve years the number gradually decreased to sixteen years, then rapidly dropped. This bears out what parents frequently said, namely, that they were accustomed to taking an additional ten acres of beets for each child when he reached the age of seven. In explanation, they said that while the seven year old did not do all the hand processes, such as bunching and topping, he worked right along with the rest and did enough work to make it possible for the family to do an additional ten acres. Quite as frequently they said that as soon as children were old enough to secure work permits in the city or to handle a team "they graduated from beets."

Many of the children were experienced hands at working beets. The 995 child workers under sixteen years of age averaged three seasons in the field. Nearly one-fourth of them had worked from five to ten seasons. Taking into consideration the entire number of 1,236 workers under twenty-one years of age, they averaged 4.5 seasons and 42 had worked between ten and thirteen seasons in succession.

As a rule children under seven years were not required to go into the field when there were older children who worked. Frequently the older children, as they counted with their parents the number of seasons each child had worked, referred to the fact that the "kits has it easy," compared with the older children who began work in the field as young as five or six. On the other hand, fathers who were a bit ashamed to admit they required very young children to work in the field, were sometimes inclined to state an age two or three years in advance of that

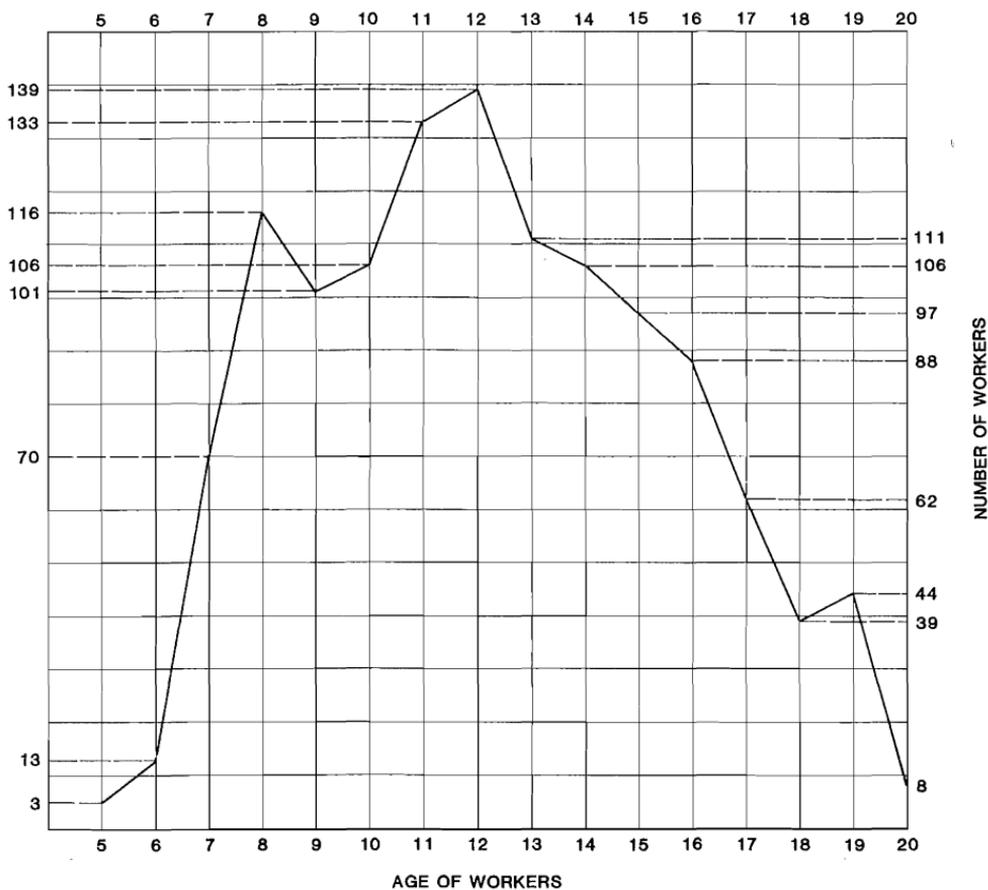
TABLE 3
Children in 355 families, doing hand work, by numbers, according to age groups and seasons worked.

Age Group	Seasons Worked												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
5-9 yrs.	177	93	25	6	2								
10-15 yrs.	100	103	129	137	90	53	43	29	7	1			
Total 5-15 yrs.	227	196	154	143	92	53	43	29	7	1			
Total 16-20 yrs.	9	16	22	24	18	25	32	24	30	23	10	3	5
Grand Total 5-20 yrs.	286	212	176	167	110	78	75	53	37	24	10	3	5



Shack for beet workers.

AGE OF WORKERS



given by the children and the mothers. One girl sixteen years old said, "I worked beets ever since I was six." Her mother affirmed. The father spoke up and said, "Count it from ten, before that she was too leetle." In fact the girl was working her eleventh season.

The actual number of seasons worked by children in the two groups, 5 to 9 years and 10 to 15 years of age, and by young persons 16 to 20 years of age, is shown in Table 3. It is significant that of the 995 children under 16 years, 522 or 52.5 percent had worked beets three seasons or more.

Kind of Work Done by Children — The traveler who chanced to pass along roads leading through the beet districts of the North Platte valley during thinning season in June, looked upon a familiar sight. Groups of children and parents moved along rows of tiny beet plants bunching with their hoes as they went. Directly behind them children of all sizes crawled along the ground on their hands and knees plucking out other beet plants with their fingers. They were thinning.

One passing the same fields during harvest in October again saw groups at work. They hurried along rows of full-grown beets. Children were in the lead. Fathers brought up the rear. They were pulling beets out of the ground from one or two rows. A little later in the day, they came back along the windrow of pulled beets, cutting off the leaves and crown with large, sharp knives. They were topping.

Between thinning time in June and harvest in October, there had been other work for all hands: "hoeing" and "weeding."

The peculiar form of the beet seed has much to do with the kind of hand work required to produce sugar beets, and it is in the hand work processes that children are used. The seed is, in reality, a ball containing many seeds. These seed balls are drilled in rows far enough apart to permit a horse-drawn cultivator to go between them — usually twenty inches. Plants come up so close together that they form a solid mass. All plants not necessary for a good stand must be removed by hand.

The first hand work, then, is bunching and thinning. It is begun as soon as plants show four leaves and the grower has them cultivated. It must be completed as rapidly as possible and according to well defined rules of contract. One form of contract with "Hints on sugar beet culture" states, "An average or ideal stand is 36,000 beets to the acre, planted in 20-inch rows." It further states that the operation of thinning is considered "the most delicate and most important" and "in fact the one upon which the results of the beet crop largely depends." The element of time is an important factor in this hand work. Children are therefore involved in the speeding up, since it means larger money returns to the parent who can do more acres and to the grower who can produce more tons.

In Scotts Bluff County there is a Reclamation Project Experiment Farm. During the seasons of 1917, '18 and '19, it conducted a "time-of-thinning test." The United States Department of Agriculture, Circular 173, p. 17, says of this experiment: "The average results for three years show that where thinning was delayed 10 days the yield was cut down 1.61 tons per acre, and with a delay of 20 days the yield was reduced 5.09 tons per acre. On the basis of these results, 25 acres of beets thinning at the proper time will produce the same tonnage as 34.5 acres thinned 20 days later. When beets are worth \$10 a ton and the hauling costs \$1 plus the value of the beet tops per ton, the net profit from beets thinned at the proper time will be \$45.80 per acre more than from beets thinned 20 days later. On a 25-acre field this extra profit would amount to \$1,145.00."

Bunching and thinning was begun in the North Platte valley in 1923 late in May and early in June. All the 995 child workers of this study under sixteen years of age engaged in one or both of these processes. In addition to helping with the thinning, 617 children, including 59 under ten years of age, bunched.

In bunching they cut out with a hoe all plants in the row except *bunches* at such intervals as the grower designated, usually nine or ten inches. Some workers used short-handled hoes which required a bending position as strokes followed each other in rapid succession. Others used a long-handled hoe but even this necessitated considerable stooping.

Thinning afforded work for the youngest children in the family. A few five-year-olds thinned, and of the entire number there were 303 under ten years of age engaged in this process. In thinning they removed by hand all the beet plants from the bunch except one. The thinner selected the healthiest plant in each bunch to be left, placed his thumb and finger firmly against it to prevent it from being disturbed, then with his free hand took out all other plants and weeds. It was necessary to use both hands at the same time. This required the worker either to walk in a bending position with both hands on the ground, his head hanging down, or to crawl along the ground on his hands and knees. Many very small children were skilled thinners. One American farmer said "Children can do thinning just as well or better than adults." A contract father said "Little children thin fine, no hurt them in backs. Hurt me in back bad, to bend all day."

The first hoeing was commenced as soon as thinning was completed and the grower had finished the second cultivation. It consisted of pulling dirt to the plants with an ordinary hoe, cutting out any weeds near the row which had been left by the cultivator, hilling and removing all plants overlooked in thinning and all weeds very near the plant. Two, sometimes three, hoeings were required to keep the field free from weeds.

The second hoeing was referred to as "weeding," and required as much work as was necessary to keep the entire field free from weeds until harvest. A hoe was used to cut the weeds except such as were very near the leaves of the plant. These were removed by hand.

Contrary to the opinion frequently voiced that only older children are required to hoe, it was found that 907 out of the 995 children under sixteen years made regular hands with the hoe. Of these, 228 or 25 per cent were under ten years of age.

Harvest began in the North Platte valley the third week in September. Several families in this study did not remain for harvest, but 913 of the 995 children under sixteen years of age pulled, and of this number 818 also helped with topping.

The first hand work of the harvest was pulling beets out of the ground after they had been lifted or plowed out by the grower with an implement made for that purpose. The "lifter" loosened and slightly raised the beets, leaving them standing in the soil. They were then pulled by hand. In pulling the worker grasped the tops of one or more beets in each hand, pulled them free from the soil, knocked them together to remove as much of the clinging dirt as possible, and threw them into rows. An effort was made to have all tops in one direction to facilitate the work of topping.

In topping, workers chopped off the leafy top and crown of the beet root just above the sun line with a beet knife. The knife, necessarily sharp, had to pass through the thickest and most fibrous part of the beet. This required an accurate and forceful stroke. In case the beet was small or of medium size, a single stroke was sufficient to cut off the top, but if the beet was large, it required an additional "trimming up."

Different types of knives were used for topping. The three most commonly used in the valley were: first, a knife 16 inches long with a straight steel blade 10 inches long and $1\frac{1}{2}$ to $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches wide, with a $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch hook extending from the point; second, a knife $17\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length with a blade 12 inches long and $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 inches wide; and third, a knife with curved handle and curved blade, 15 inches long, the blade $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length and from $1\frac{1}{4}$ to $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in width.

Topping was generally recognized as hard work. As one American farmer said, "I never could see how children eight, nine and ten could top beets. I want you to know it is hard work to hold a four to eight-pound beet in one hand and cut off the top with one of those knives." The child in topping grasped the knife in his right hand. It was understood that when he used the hook of the knife to pick up the beet he was to stick it into the crown or top to avoid doing damage by cutting gashes in the body of the beet. Then he grasped the beet in his left hand and removed the hook or knife by lifting up on the handle. At this point, he did one of two things; he either held the beet away from his body

with his left hand, or laid it across the right knee as a "chopping block." In either case, with the knife in his right hand, he cut off the top with one or more strokes. As beets were topped, they were thrown in piles ready for hauling from the field. If the pile was to remain in the field overnight, it was covered with the cut-off tops to prevent evaporation.

The number of children (under 16 years) and young persons (16 to 20 years) who worked in each process is given in Table 4. The largest number working in any one process was 1,230 in thinning. Since the majority of the workers engaged in all five processes, the numbers in each cannot be added together without duplication.

TABLE 4
Children in 355 families, doing hand work, by numbers, according to age groups and processes worked.

Age group	Bunch	Thin	Hoe	Pull	Top
5-9 years	57	303	228	251	172
10-15 years	537	690	681	662	646
16-20 years	241	237	241	241	241
Total	835	1,230	1,150	1,154	1,059

Relative Amount of Hand Work — The comparatively large amount of hand work required to produce an acre of sugar beets has apparently made the labor of children profitable to parent, grower and company. Students of labor costs have made studies of costs involved in the production of sugar beets. They show the relative amount of hand work, man-labor and horse-labor required to produce an acre of beets.

According to F.W. Peck on "The Cost of Producing Sugar Beets," University of Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 154, Table V, p. 18, an acre of sugar beets requires 266.1 hours of labor. Of this, 103 hours or 38.7 percent is in the hand work of bunching, thinning, hoeing, pulling and topping. It requires 52.4 hours or 19.7 percent of man-labor other than hand work, and 110.7 hours or 41.6 percent of horse-labor.

Stated differently, 155.4 hours or 58.4 percent of the total labor required to produce an acre of sugar beets is man-labor. Of this, 103 hours or 66.3 percent is consumed in the hand work processes in which children are used.

According to L.G. Connor, Assistant Agriculturist, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bulletin No. 165, Table XIa, Utah Agricultural College Experiment Station, on labor requirements for sugar beets, the total labor necessary to produce an acre of sugar beets is 231.8 hours. Of this 96.6 hours or 41.6 percent, are required for the hand work of

bunching, thinning, hoeing, pulling and topping. Other man-labor requires 36.7 hours or 15.7 percent; horse-labor 98.5 hours or 42.7 percent.

Stated another way, 133.3 hours or 57.5 percent of the total work required to produce an acre of beets is man-labor, and of that 96.6 hours or 72.4 percent is consumed in hand processes in which children are used.

These and other students of the matter have not differed widely in the results of their experiments and surveys. It is apparent, therefore, that the hand processes in which child labor is used comprise approximately two-thirds of the total man-labor required to produce the crop of sugar beets. Taking into consideration both man and horse-labor, the same hand processes approximate two-fifths of all labor required.

It is significant that the 16,984 acres of this study drew more than one-half of the laborers required to do all the hand processes from children under sixteen years of age. They did nearly one-half of all the work in bunching, thinning, hoeing, pulling and topping. Their contribution to the crop was no mere pastime, unless one is inclined so to designate work done by adults in the same or in other fields.

Weather — The climate of the valley is temperate. With an altitude of 3,880 feet at Scottsbluff the atmosphere is clear, sunsets gorgeous, mid-day sun hot, air invigorating and nights cool. Non-resident families, especially those accustomed to summers in lower altitudes, frequently spoke with delight of the cool nights when, as one mother said: "Always must have quilt at night, so cold. In city hot, hot all day, all night." Such expressions as "wonderful air" were heard in every quarter.

On the other hand, thunder storms and dust storms sweep across the fields. The worst dust storm of the season resembled snow blizzards common in other sections of the country. It was cutting, blinding and penetrating. As it progressed workers were forced to seek shelter.

The weather had much to do with conditions under which children worked in the field. At best, the heat of mid-day was intense and for that reason families often took at least an hour's rest at noon. Dust and sand storms were irritating, and the winds exhausting. In a few instances children wet with rain or snow continued their work in the field, but this was not common. It was said that weather conditions were out of the ordinary during the season of 1923 in the amount of rainfall, thunder and electric storms, in early frosts and snow.

According to weather reports⁹ for the vicinity of Scottsbluff, the temperature in June was: maximum 98; minimum 44; mean 66.68. During the month, rain fell on 11 days; there were thunderstorms on 5 days; and a high dust storm on the 27th.

In July the temperature was: maximum 97; minimum 49; mean 74.71. Rain fell on 9 days, there were thunderstorms on 8 days, dust storms on 2 days. On the 14th a heavy hail about eight miles northeast of the city did considerable damage to crops.

In August the temperature was: maximum 95; minimum 45; mean 69.49. There was rain on 11 days, thunderstorms on 5 days, with a violent storm the 6th of the month.

In October the temperature was: maximum 75; minimum 7; mean 47.37. Rain fell on 11 days. The first killing frost of the season occurred the 13th and the first snow fell on the 25th of the month.

In November the temperature was: maximum 69; minimum 17; mean 41.20.

Time Children Spent Doing Hand Work — Contract labor families spent six months or more in the open country. However, they were not working in the beet field all that time. The work season for each of the four processes varied, depending on the time of planting, conditions of soil and weather, number of acres and skill of the workers. Bunching and thinning lasted two or three weeks for some, four to six for others. Hoeing likewise was well over in two or three weeks in a few fields; in many it lasted seven to eight weeks. Pulling and topping was begun near the same time throughout the valley, from September 18th to 24th. It was over at any time from two to eight weeks. During the first weeks, workers were not allowed in all cases to harvest beets as rapidly as they were capable. It was necessary to limit the amount of beets delivered to the factory and as a result growers were required to slow up in removing them from the ground. It was the first of November before the "limit" was removed and contract labor families were free to push their daily work as rapidly as growers directed.

Statements of the number of days spent in actual hand work and the daily working hours were secured from parents for each child under sixteen years of age. The 995 child workers under sixteen years of age spent on an average 62 working days of 11 hours each. These were distributed as follows: in bunching and thinning, an average of 23 days of 11.5 hours; hoeing, an average of 13 days of 10 hours; pulling and topping, an average of 26 days of 11 hours.

Persons long familiar with the culture of sugar beets estimated the actual time required for the hand work was not more than from 75 to 80 working days of 11 or 12 hours each, grouped as follows: one month, bunching and thinning; one, hoeing; one, pulling and topping. One company official estimated that an acre of beets required seven days of work in all the hand processes for the entire season.

In terms of children, for instance, 240 not yet ten years of age worked 22.2 days of 11.3 hours per day thinning beets; 195 averaged 25.1 days of 11.1 hours pulling. The amount of time that individual children

worked, according to statements of their parents, is given by way of concrete illustration for a few under ten years, in the two processes of thinning and pulling.

For example, a six year old child thinned 32 days averaging 12 hours per day; another 26 days of 13 hours; another 24 days of 15 hours; another 21 days of 13 hours; two 20 days each for an average of 12 hours per day; and three 18 days of 11 hours.

Pulling: one six year old worked 36 days of 10 hours; another 30 days of 14 hours; another 26 days of 12 hours; another 24 days of 10 hours; another 20 days of 10 hours and two others 18 days of 10 hours per day.

Seven year old children thinned as follows: 7 worked 30 days of 12 to 15 hours per day; 9 worked 26 days of 10 to 14 hours; 3 for 22 days of 11 and 13 hours; 7 for 20 days of 10 to 14 hours; and 7 for 18 days of 10 to 13 hours.

Pulling: one seven year old worked 33 days of 10 hours per day; one 32 days of 9 hours; 13 for 30 days of 10 to 13 hours; 3 for 26 days of 10 and 12 hours; two 25 days of 11 hours; ten 24 days of 10 to 14 hours; and one 22 days of 11 hours.

Eight year old children thinned as follows: 3 worked 32 days averaging 10 and 12 hours per day; 5 worked 30 days of 10 to 15 hours per day; 16 for 26 days of 10 to 15 hours; 6 for 24 days of 10 to 15 hours and 15 for 20 days of 10 to 12 hours per day.

Pulling: one eight year old worked 38 days averaging 10 hours per day; 2 worked 36 days of 10 hours; one 35 days of 13 hours; two 32 days of 10 hours; 13 for 30 days of 10 to 14 hours; three 27 days of 12 hours; and 40 worked 20 days and more averaging from 10 to 12 hours per day.

Nine year old children thinned as follows: 6 worked 30 days averaging 12 hours per day; 7 worked 26 days of 12 hours and more; 13 worked 20 days of 12 and 14 hours; 15 worked 18 days of 10 to 14 hours per day.

Pulling: one nine year old worked 36 days of 10 hours per day; another 34 days of 12 hours; 21 worked 30 days of 10 to 12 hours; 6 worked 24 days of 11 hours; and 11 worked 20 days of 10 to 13 hours per day.

Nationality— Even children knew that Americans seldom worked in the beet field. "Naw, my papa don't work beets. We're Americans. Just 'Roosians' and 'Mexes' do beets," said little Margaret when asked if her father worked beets. Nowhere in the North Platte valley were children of contract labor families called "Hunkies" as in other beet growing sections. They were spoken of as "Roosians" or "Mexicans" and all were called "foreigners." Lines of distinction were drawn between nationalities and were determined neither by property nor by labor.

Eighty-three and one-half percent of the children of this study are American born. In other words out of a total of 2,589 children born to the families of this study, 2,162 were born in the United States. Those of Russian German parentage predominated. In the 355 families, there were 270 fathers, or 78.8 percent, who were born in Russia of German stock. Next in numbers were the Spanish American and the Mexican, both commonly called "Mexes." There were in all 57, or 13.2 percent, who belonged to this racial group, of whom 44 fathers were born in Mexico and 13 in the United States of Spanish, Mexican or Indian stock. Of the latter, one of the women said, "We are American Mexicans"; another said, "Our language is derived from the Spanish." On the whole, 92 percent of the families of this study were either Russian German or Mexican. Americans came next with 20 families, or 5.5 percent, then those born in Germany three, Italy two, Japan one, Greece one and Poland one.

Russian Germans furnish the majority in both the contract labor and grower groups. Mexicans were found only in contract labor; Germans and Italians only among growers. A single Japanese family and a Greek family were working under contract, but in each instance it was for a relative. They were the only families of these nationalities coming under observation who used their children in the beet field. In the one case the only child working was eight years old and in the other were children whose ages were seven, ten and twelve years. It was not uncommon to find a farm owner of one nationality, his tenant of another, and the contract labor family of still another, all living on the same farm. One American owner and his Japanese tenant lived in the same farmyard, while the latter's Russian German contract labor family lived in a "beet shack" to the rear of the other dwellings. Another Russian German owner had his Mexican beet labor living in a shack in his corral. The number of families and the nationality of the fathers in both the contract labor and the grower groups is shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5
Distribution of 355 families, by numbers, according to nationality and family group.

Nationality	Contract Labor No. Families	Grower No. Families	Total No. Families
Russian German	222	48	270
Mexican	44	0	44
Spanish American . . .	13	0	13
American	15	5	20
Italian	0	3	3
German	0	2	2
Japanese	1	0	1
Greek	1	0	1
Polish	1	0	1
Totals	297	58	355

Understanding of English — While many families used only their mother tongue in their own homes, practically all the children understood English. A few too young to enter school neither spoke nor understood it. Nearly all of the fathers spoke and understood English well enough to answer a few questions put to them in their own language without the aid of an interpreter. All but eight of the 309 living foreign-born fathers spoke English; 224 did not read and 242 did not write English. There were, however, 177 who read some language other than English. For instance, 154 read German and nine of these also read Russian

A much larger proportion of the mothers were neither able to speak nor understand English. This, however, is not unusual among immigrant families. Unless an immigrant mother works outside her home, she stays very closely within her own group and does not learn English readily. Some of the mothers were able to understand but were hesitant to express themselves in English. One who had been in the United States twenty-three years understood not only the questions put to her in her own language but also those in English, yet she was not able to make herself understood without the aid of her sixteen year old daughter. A Russian German mother who expressed herself with considerable difficulty cheerfully declared that some day she would "know English" for, as she said, "My Mollie she say, 'Mamma put on nice dress, come to school today. Teacher she say all mammas *must* come to party. Come on, you learn much English and America.'" Another said she would not be satisfied until she added "Jap" and "Mexican" to her speaking knowledge of German and Russian.

In these families there were living 304 foreign-born mothers. There were 206 who did not speak English; 260 did not read and 267 did not write English. There were, however, 136 who read a language other than English. . . .

A surprising thing was the fact that less than one-sixth of the immigrant fathers were citizens of the United States, and less than one-third had gone to the trouble to make declaration of intention to become citizens. This in spite of the fact that they averaged more than fifteen years in this country. Only 57, or 16 percent, out of 323 foreign-born fathers are citizens, and only 115 others, or 32 percent, had taken the first step and made declaration of intention, commonly spoken of as securing the "first paper." A tenant farmer who had been in the United States sixteen years and in Nebraska seven, when asked if he had his first paper said, "No, nobody ever bother me." Though above the average of his group, a reliable member of his community, he had taken no oath of allegiance to the United States of America and was having no part in the Government.

As to citizenship there was practically no difference between contract laborers, many of whom were not permanent residents of the

valley, and growers, who in this case included only those in selected districts doing all the hand work in their own beets. In order to know whether this showing of non-citizenship was a just representation of all the foreign born men more permanently attached to the valley, Scotts Bluff County was selected for further inquiry, as it has a large population of foreign born whites.

Through the courtesy of the Clerk of the District Court of Scotts Bluff County, the naturalization records in his office were made available. In answer to inquiry, he said, "Off hand, I should say not twenty percent of the immigrants in the county are naturalized." Upon looking through the records for the five years ending August 1923, it was found that 194 persons had made declaration of intention. Only 69 had taken the second step and petitioned for naturalization papers. Of these, 39 gave Russia as place of birth; 10 Germany; 6 Denmark; 2 each gave Canada, Austria, Italy, Syria, Sweden, and England. One each gave Switzerland and Ireland.

Compared with the census figures of 1920, the numbers seem very low. The total population of the county was 20,710. Of these 3,551 were foreign born white; 4,403 native white of foreign and mixed parentage; and 12,756 were native white of native parentage. Of the 3,551 foreign born, 2,228 or 62.7 percent gave Russia as place of birth; 207 or 5.2 percent gave Mexico; 163 Germany; 131 Canada; 93 Sweden; 71 Greece; 63 England; 57 Denmark; 44 Ireland; 36 Czechoslovakia; 25 Scotland; 18 Austria; 15 Norway; 11 Poland; 10 Switzerland; 8 Italy; 8 Jugo Slavia; 5 Wales; 4 France; 3 Belgium; 1 Hungary; 1 Netherlands; and all others, 43.

The "first paper" requires an avowal of purpose to become an American citizen and renunciation of allegiance to the country of which the alien is a citizen. It requires payment of the nominal sum of one dollar. The oath of allegiance reads: "I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and adjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state or sovereignty, and particularly to ----- of whom I have heretofore been a subject; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; and that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same."

Experience in Beets — A picturesque procession of immigrant family groups laden with hoes and beet knives annually makes its way into the beet field. They are there for one purpose. Work. Work for all. The years go by and from the group older children drop out. A family numbers nine one year, a father, mother, perhaps one child over sixteen years, three or four between seven and sixteen years, and two or three under seven. The next year the same family numbers seven, then six, then five, until finally it comes no more to the beet fields, because there are no children left who are too young to secure other kinds of work.

However, other families with young children join the ranks and family groups continue.

The idea of graduation carries with it the attainment of a goal, something worth striving for, an achievement. Every year children "graduate from beet work" as they "grow up" and become old enough to secure work permits in the city or handle a team on the farm. Such remarks as these were heard on every hand. A grower said, "As soon as a child is big enough to handle a team, he graduates from the hoe." Again, a field man remarked, "As children grow up, they graduate from beet work." A contract labor mother said, "We come no more to beets, maybe one year, maybe two, no more cause *kinder* all grow up."

For an average of 7.5 seasons the 355 families of this study had been working beets. For some, it was the first and for others the twenty-first. Of the entire time spent in beets they averaged 5.5 seasons in the fields of Nebraska.

Contract labor families averaged 7.25 seasons; 5 seasons in Nebraska, and 1.25 on the farm where they worked in 1923. Grower families averaged 8.7 seasons in beets, 7.3 in Nebraska and 3.0 on the farm where they lived in 1923. Thirty-eight growers, or 65.7 percent had worked under contract and twenty, or 34.3 percent had not. Those who had done contract labor averaged 5.1 seasons under contract. Nine were *growing* beets for the first time. On the whole, they had spent one and a half seasons longer in beets than the contract labor families and had stayed nearly three times as long at the same farm.

Among growers, farm tenants outnumbered owners: 43 were tenants and 15 were owners. A few owners had formerly been tenants; 47 families averaged 5.3 years as tenants, and 14 families averaged 4.7 years as farm-owners.

Size of Family in Relation to Acres Worked — The amount of hand work family groups undertook was determined in the case of contract labor by the number of children big enough and little enough to help do the work. In the case of growers who depended on their own families to do *all* the hand work, the number of acres undertaken was determined by several matters, such as size of the farm, acreage under cultivation, rotation of crops and number of workers in the family. Many citizens of the valley familiar with the subject over a period of years expressed a belief that children of growers who performed *all* their own hand work did just as much work in the beet field as children of contract labor, and helped besides with the rest of the farm work. They took care of the garden, milked, fed stock and chickens, and helped with the chores about the home in which farm children usually participate. Fathers of grower families who did *all* their hand work left the beets to the younger children and their mothers, while they with the older children planted, cultivated, irrigated, lifted and hauled the beets and cared for the other crops.

The 297 contract labor families worked 15,030 acres, an average of 50.6 acres per family. There were 1,634 persons who made regular hands in the field: 815 or 49.8 percent were children under 16 years, and 819 or 50.2 percent were persons over 16 years. The 815 children worked 6,763.5 acres, an average of 8.3 per child. The 819 persons over 16 years worked 8,266.5 acres, an average of 10.9 per person. The latter included 279 fathers and 238 mothers who had worked with their children. All this is based on information given by the parents

TABLE 6

Age Group	1 Number of Workers	2 Percentage of all Hand Workers, 1,634	3 Number of Acres Worked	4 Percentage Worked of 15,030 Acres	5 Average Acres Worked by Each Person
5-9 years	247	15.1	1,509	10.65	6.07
10-15 years	568	34.7	5,254.5	34.55	9.26
5-15 years	815	49.8	6,763.5	45.2	
16-20 years	199	12.2	2,224.5	14.35	11.1
21 and over	620	38.0	6,042	40.45	9.7
Total	1,634	100.0	15,030	100.00	

The relation between the number of acres worked and the number of persons over five years of age in the 297 contract labor households is given in Table 7. It is significant that with two exceptions the average number of acres worked increased directly in proportion to the size of the family.

The 58 grower families worked 1,954 acres, an average of 33.6 acres per family. They lived on farms averaging 111.8 acres with 73.3 acres under cultivation. There were 279 persons who made regular hands in the hand work on beets; 180 or 64.5 percent were children under 16 years of age, and 99 or 35.5 percent were persons over 16 years. Of the 55 fathers, only 10 did any work on beets. Of the 58 mothers, 46 worked in the beet fields with their children

Composition of the Family — Families working beets were usually spoken of as large. There were living at home in the 355 beet working households a total of 2,063 children, or an average of 5.8 per family. In addition, 211 children were away from home and 319 were dead. Taking into account the total number of 2,589 children born to these parents, families averaged 7.3 children each.

Relatively there was no difference in the size of the contract labor and the grower families of this study. A larger number of the contract

labor children had left home, although grower parents were older and had practically the same number of children of comparable ages.

TABLE 7
Showing the relation of number of acres worked by 297 contract labor families to number of persons in household over 5 years of age.

Number in Household Over 5 years	Number of Families	Total Number Acres Contracted	Average Number Acres per Family
2	1	25.0	25.0
3	17	796.0	47.0
4	30	1,186.0	39.5
5	53	2,161.0	40.7
6	79	3,877.0	49.0
7	57	3,115.5	54.6
8	38	2,322.0	61.6
9	15	1,024.5	68.3
10	4	268.0	67.0
11	2	155.0	77.5
14	1	100.0	100.0
Total	297	15,030.0	50.6

The contract labor mothers had given birth to 2,176 children, an average of 7.3 per family. There were 1,881 living. However, 185, or 9.8 percent, had left home. That left an average of 5.7 children living at home in the beet working household.

The grower mothers had given birth to 413 children, an average of 7.1 per family. There were 389 living. Of the number 26, or 6.6 percent, had left home. That left an average of 6.2 children living at home on the farm.

TABLE 8

Age Group	1 Number of Workers (58 grower families)	2 Percentage of all Hand Workers, (279)	3 Number of Acres Worked	4 Percentage of 1,954 Acres Worked	5 Average Acres Worked by Each Person
5-9 years	56	20.0	314	16.0	5.6
10-15 years	124	44.0	918	47.0	7.4
5-15 years	180	64.0	1,232	63.0	
16-20 years	42	15.0	367	19.0	8.7
21 and over	57	21.0	355	18.0	6.2
16 and over	99	36.0	722	37.0	
Total	279	100.0	1,954	100.0	

As to the children's parents, 286 contract labor and 55 grower fathers were living. Of the mothers, 283 contract labor and 58 grower mothers were living. There were 341 fathers and 341 mothers living in their family groups. No family was found with neither father nor mother living.

In the matter of age, contract fathers averaged 42 years, with a range of 24 to 63 years. They had been in the United States an average of 14.2 years. Mothers in the contract labor group averaged 38.5 years of age with a range from 23 to 60 years. In grower families, the average age of the fathers was 43, with a range from 30 to 58 years. They had averaged 16.5 years in the United States. Mothers of the grower group averaged 36.5 years of age with a range from 28 to 56 years.

On an average the grower fathers were one year older and had been in the United States two years longer than the contract labor fathers of this study.

How Children Were Brought to the Beet Fields and Why — The raising of sugar beets in any community is carried on as part of a highly organized system. The very nature of the crop makes it impossible for one farmer or even for several to grow beets profitably except as part of the system. In fact, it is a community industry interdependent with many factors inside and outside the immediate vicinity.

One very important factor is the supply of hand labor required to do the vast amount of hand work in the comparatively short time in which it must be completed. Resident farm labor cannot supply the demand. Therefore it is necessary to plan in advance of the crop just what part of the hand labor can be supplied from within the beet district and what part has to be brought in from outside. This is determined quite accurately.

When a farmer contracts with a company to raise a given acreage of sugar beets, he makes known what hand labor he expects to use, and record is made in connection with his contract as a grower. He does one of three things. He uses his own family to do all the hand work, employing no help outside his own household; he does a part of his own hand work and has the remainder done by contract labor; or he does no hand work but depends entirely on contract labor. In case he requires contract labor, he either gets in touch with the contractor himself or asks the company to secure sufficient labor to supply his needs.

There were 58 grower families included in this study. They did *all* the hand work in their own fields and were representative of those growers in the valley who used only their own children. No attempt is made to consider them representative of any other group of growers. Nearly two-thirds or 65.5 percent had on an average spent in contract labor 5.1 out of the 8.7 years they had been in beets. When they first came into the valley, 38 families came under the system for recruiting

contract labor. Without doubt a careful inquiry would show that a large number of the growers who use their children to do any part of the hand work in their own fields at one time or another worked beets under contract. Officials of the sugar company reported that approximately one-third of the 3,000 Nebraska beet growers of the season did their own hand work and two-thirds had it done by contract labor.

The grower who undertook to secure his own contract labor sought out families living in the vicinity who were known to him through one means or another. The contract was entered into, the company notified, and the grower made arrangements directly with the family. When the grower did not find his own "beet tenders" the company secured them for him.

Through its department of fields the company assumed definite responsibility for recruiting contract labor sufficient to supply all growers applying to it for hand workers. It acted as labor agent, handled the signing of contracts between growers and contractors and furnished transportation for families and their household goods to the beet fields. Through its representative known as [a] field man, it directed all the work on beets as specified in the labor contract.

Company representatives went into immigrant districts of cities in the mid-west and southwest for the purpose of procuring contract labor families. Often the superintendent of fields went in person. Late in April, 1923, representatives from companies operating in three states were in Lincoln at the same time, bidding for contract families. Others were in Dallas, Fort Worth, San Antonio, and other cities negotiating for a labor supply. Various means were used to secure families. Advertisements were inserted in papers and hand bills in foreign languages distributed. Local leaders were utilized and often house to house canvasses were made for the purpose of talking up beets and explaining the advantages of work in the open country. These advantages, as represented, included free railroad transportation for the family and the household goods, free haul to the farm from the railroad station nearest the point of destination in the beet fields, free return to the same railroad station, "reasonable living accommodations, with suitable water near at hand for drinking and domestic purposes," opportunity to keep chickens and a cow and to raise a garden. Besides, they were promised as much work as they wanted for large and small, at a specified price per acre, in the fresh air of open fields, with a month or two during the summer when men could secure other work at a daily wage. It was agreed, if necessary, to "stake" the family for food until the first pay was received.

Labor representatives of the company usually took with them contracts for hand labor for the season known as the "labor contract." In most instances the contracts had already been signed by the growers. Among other things they specified the number of acres "more or less"

to be worked, the location of the plots, the size of the shack, and the distance from a trading center. This furnished the contractor information on which he could determine where he could secure the total acreage he desired, whether it was all in one plot, and if in more than one, how far apart. When he secured the acreage he wanted, he signed the one or more contracts in duplicate, and retained a copy of each.

With this, families began making preparation to go to the country. At a time designated by the company agent, the families congregated at railroad stations where transportation was furnished and were shipped often by the train load to points in Nebraska. Baggage, including a limited amount of household goods, was shipped on the same train. Goods belonging to families leaving the train at the same station were placed in one box car. As they reached the points of destination, the box car was switched off and families going to farms in that vicinity left the train. Farmers with whom they had contracted met them at the station and hauled them and their baggage to the shack in which they were to live. One field man in telling of the system, said, "And by afternoon a family is settled."

The time of moving to the beet fields varies but little from year to year. Families arrived in the valley as early as February and as late as June. The majority of the 297, or 206 families, arrived in May; 23 in June; 21 in April; 11 in March; 2 in February. The time of moving for ten of the families was not known and 24 went from nearby farms during the early spring months.

Securing an early shipment of labor especially when it comes from points of any great distance is said to be a very important matter. An article headed "Agreement is Reached on the Beet Labor Contract," published in the *Scottsbluff Star-Herald* February 8, 1924, in reporting a meeting of the board of directors of the Co-operative Beet Growers Association with officials of the Great Western Sugar Company, gave the report of a committee of growers said to be that "which . . . forms the basis of the Nebraska contract" for 1924. The article referring to early shipment of labor among other things stated: "Normally the larger part of the labor is shipped during May. This year it will be necessary to start shipping early in April, because it will be impossible to engage the full number required during the month of May. Texas labor markets are fed by immigration. The labor usually is shipped out within a day or two after they arrive at the market point - especially is that true when the demand for labor is heavy.

"It would be disastrous to ship in part of the labor late, as heavy losses in tonnage are sustained if the thinning is delayed for three or four weeks . . . We urge every member of this association who will use shipped-in labor to make his plans to receive such labor any day after April 1st, and notify his fieldman accordingly. Fix up the labor house, if necessary, to make it suitable for a family to move in early. Try to fur-

nish the man some work before thinning is started, at least enough to pay his grocery bill for that time. On the early shipments, only *family* labor will be furnished, as far as possible, only *experienced family* labor. On the later shipments, it will not be possible to make as good selection. Surely it will be necessary to ship more single labor this year than during any of the past three seasons, but they will not be shipped early. The *early shipped labor* will be the *best*. In extending grocery credit for this early labor, before thinning is started, we suggest you limit it to \$1.50 per person per week and furnish not more than a two weeks' supply at any time. Authorize the grocer to sell only necessities, including beans, potatoes, flour, bacon, salt, coffee, baking powder, sugar, soap, overalls, work shoes, work shirts and similar supplies for *women and children*.¹⁰

In case families are not deeply rooted elsewhere, they are often encouraged to settle in towns and villages in the beet districts. This eliminates a heavy annual expense to the company for shipping in labor from outside and gradually builds up a more or less permanent supply of beet tenders. It is generally conceded by company officials and other citizens that the large immigrant population of Scotts Bluff, Morrill and Lincoln counties, is, in the main, made up of families originally shipped into the valley by the company as contract labor to work beets. Scottsbluff and Gering have their colonies of Russian Germans spoken of as "Russia Town" or "Little Moscow." Scottsbluff, Bayard and Minatare have colonies of Mexicans and Spanish Americans with their picturesque 'dobe houses.

Whether contract labor was recruited from outside the beet district or from the more or less permanent supply of beet tenders, many features were the same. The children's father contracted with the grower to do all the hand work on a specified number of acres. The distance of this acreage from the home of the contractor determined whether families were able to remain in their own homes during the working season, going out to the field and returning at the close of each day's work, or whether they were obliged to move into the open country. A limited number of families living in the beet district and having some means of transportation available were able to secure acreage near enough their homes to save them the necessity of moving. During the process of this study about ten such families came under observation, but were not visited because they lived in urban centers, merely driving into the open country the days they were at work. By far the largest majority of contract labor families in the valley were obliged to leave their homes and move into the open country for the six or seven months during which they were required to be near the fields in which they worked.

Families moved in large numbers during the month of May and returned as late as November. The time of leaving in the spring was

highly important from the standpoint of the family. Competition for their labor was one factor. They were anxious to sign up for the best money returns. Beet work was to furnish their big cash income for the year. Many were eager to avail themselves of free rent as early in the spring as the farmer would permit them to move in. Others were lead on by the thought of other farm work at a good wage. There was, however, one drawback—city and town schools did not plan the closing date of the spring term to accommodate the work life of beet working families, but closed late in May or well on in June.

In several cities from which large numbers of families leave annually for the beet fields, company and school officials have made an effort to agree upon a date of leaving satisfactory to them and the families. For instance, during the last two or three years in Scottsbluff, families have been notified they would not be allowed to take their children out of school before the close of the term. The closing date was set so as to release all beet working children in ample time to get into the field for the first hand work. Teachers reported that it was not unusual for families to have their goods loaded ready to start the very afternoon the children were released from school. Sometimes when recitations were over, the grade cards were issued and children were allowed to leave the day before school closed officially. In Lincoln, where the city schools close early in June, a plan has been in operation for two years in which the attendance department, the Juvenile Court, representatives of the State, the families and the company cooperate. The group agrees upon a date after which children may be taken out of school when their parents leave for the beet fields. In 1922, it was May 20th; in 1923, it was May 14th.

The time of return from the beet fields is left with the individual family. It depends on several things, such as the date on which the family finishes harvest, the distance necessary to move, and the desire to have the children back in school. Usually families are responsible for getting back to their homes or moving to whatever place they wish to spend the winter

Earnings – Children are not contracted to do hand work on beets. The father contracts to do the hand work on a given number of acres. The children work for the father but are neither hired nor paid for their labor. Nevertheless, what they contribute to the family earnings and support is an item of no small importance.

Contract labor fathers of this study were paid \$21.00 and \$22.00 an acre for the hand work of the season. In addition they received a bonus based upon the net weight of beets produced on the acreage they worked.

Families receiving \$21.00 an acre were paid according to two schedules. The hand process of bunching and thinning paid \$8.00 and

\$8.50 per acre; hoeing \$3.00 and \$2.00; second hoeing and weeding \$2.00 and \$1.00; pulling and topping \$8.00 and \$9.50 an acre.

Families receiving \$22.00 an acre were paid by the acre as follows: \$8.00 for bunching and thinning; \$4.00 for the first hoeing; \$2.00 for second hoeing and weeding; \$8.00 for pulling, topping and covering the beets.

One form of contract specified the following bonus schedule: \$1.00 per acre for a yield of over 11 tons net weight, up to and including 12 tons per acre; \$2.00 an acre for a yield of 12 to 13 tons; \$3.00 an acre for 13 to 14 tons, continuing on the same basis up to and including the total production per acre.

In referring to the matter of pay, an official of a sugar company stated that while the company did not legally guarantee the contractor his pay, it saw to it that he received the amount due him for labor. The company supervised the contractor's work in the field, passed upon it when finished and advanced payments for the grower, deducting the same from his account after beets were harvested and delivered in the fall.

Contract labor families stated they received the first payment, which was for bunching and thinning, after the first hoeing late in June and early in July; the second payment for the second hoeing, in September, after harvest was begun; and the last payment in October or November after pulling and topping was finished. The bonus was due after the grower had finished delivering his beets to the company in November or December.

In the 297 contract labor families of the study there were 1,634 workers who did the hand work on 15,030 acres, an average of 50.6 acres per family and 9.2 per worker. Less than 100 of the workers were reported to be leaving the fields before harvest was completed. At the rate of \$21.00 an acre, they earned \$315,630.00, or an average of \$1,062.00 per family and \$193.16 per worker, exclusive of any bonus they might receive.

These 1,634 hand workers belonged to four age groups as follows: 247 were children under 10 years; 568 were children between 10 and 15 years inclusive; 199 were young persons between 16 and 20 years inclusive; and 620 were adults 21 years and over. In the course of conversation with the parents and children of each family parents were asked to compute the number of acres their children worked. With few exceptions they had very definite knowledge as to just how many acres they counted on each child doing. Most of them had computed the total family acreage on the very same basis. Their computations were strikingly uniform though families lived far apart, were not known to each other and had no means of consulting one another on the subject. Such information was compiled for the four age groups as the most

authentic available in computing the total and the average number of acres worked by each group.

On this basis, the average earnings for each age group and for each worker were estimated as a fair showing of their contribution to the family income. The 247 child workers under 10 years of age, according to statements made by the parents, did the hand work on 1,509 acres, an average of 6.07 acres per child. At the rate of \$21.00 per acre they contributed to the family earnings \$31,689, an average of \$128.30 per child. This explains why parents work their children.

The 568 child workers between the ages of 10 and 15 years inclusive, according to statements of their parents, did the hand work on 5,254.5 acres, an average of 9.26 acres per child. At the rate of \$21.00 an acre they earned for their families \$110,344.50, an average of \$194.26 per child. This again explains why parents work their children.

The 119 young persons between 16 and 20 years inclusive, according to their parents, worked 2,224.5 acres, an average of 11.1 per person. At the rate of \$21.00 an acre they added to the family earnings \$46,714.50, an average of \$234.74 per person.

The 620 adults of 21 years and over worked 6,042 acres, an average of 9.7 per person. At the rate of \$21.00 an acre they earned \$126,882.00, an average of \$204.64 per person. Mothers who could not possibly make full time in the field are included in this group.

Thus it appears that child workers under 10 years of age earned more than 10 percent of the total earnings of \$315,630.00; child workers 10 to 15 years inclusive earned nearly 35 percent; young persons 16 to 20 years inclusive earned nearly 15 percent; and adult workers 21 years and over more than 40 percent.

Estimated earnings are given for the 815 child workers and the 819 other workers of the 297 contract labor families, based on the number of acres they worked at the rate of \$21.00 per acre. . . .

TABLE 9

1 Age Group	2 Number of Workers	3 Total Acres Worked	4 Average Acres Worked	5 Total Earnings at \$21.00 per Acre	6 Average Earnings per Worker	7 Percent of Total Earnings
5-9 years	247	1,509.0	6.07	\$ 31,689.00	\$128.30	10.1
10-15 years	568	5,254.5	9.26	110,344.50	194.26	34.9
16-20 years	199	2,224.5	11.1	46,714.50	234.74	14.8
21 and over	620	6,042.0	9.7	216,882.00	204.68	40.2
All ages	1,634	15,030.00	9.2	\$315,630.00	\$193.16	100.0

Other Work — Several contract labor families did other work during the summer when beets did not require attention. The amount varied

from three or four days to four weeks. They were paid the usual wage of the neighborhood for whatever kind of work they performed. There were 114 fathers who reported work as follows: 81 on farms, 29 common labor, 3 in stores and 1 in a factory. Three family groups worked in other crops and ten children over fourteen years of age were hired out.

It is the practice for many contract labor fathers to depend on the family work in beets as their principal means of support for the entire year. When such is the case, fathers do no work during the winter. The largest number who reported work of any kind during the winter preceding the beet season of 1923 came from the larger cities, where doubtless work was more plentiful than elsewhere. In small centers, especially those located in beet districts, the kind of work that might be had is comparatively limited. This fact, combined with a well recognized lack of desire on the part of many fathers to accept work of any kind, leaves large numbers of men idle all winter. When citizens of the valley spoke of this lamentable custom they often used the expression "the men hibernate."

There were 167, or 58 percent of the 286 contract labor fathers, who stated they did *no* work of *any kind* during the winter preceding the sugar beet season of 1923. The remaining 119 or 42 percent reported periods of employment varying from one to ten weeks, by far the larger number not exceeding four weeks. As to other members of the family, there were 28 reported as working outside the family home. Most of these were mothers who went out by the day to do washing and cleaning.

As one means of assisting resident beet workers to secure employment at such periods as they are not required to work in the field, the company made arrangements with other employers of labor to use as many of them as possible. As a result the railroad, pipe line, and highway construction gangs offered work for a limited number for several weeks at a time. Stockmen used others in feeding and caring for stock during the winter. The sugar factory, the largest single employer of labor in the valley, afforded employment for a large number of men for three or four months from September to January or February. However, members of contract labor families were in the fields until the close of harvest and did not have opportunity to secure work in the factory in any large numbers. For many the uncertainty of other employment and a willingness to spend the winter in idleness, left the family dependent upon work in the beet field as the sole means of support for the entire year.

Reasons Given for Children Working — As a means of determining why children under sixteen years of age are required to work in the beet fields, persons were questioned who had widely differing viewpoints

and interests in the matter, and who were in position to know. Their replies were singularly uniform. A few are here given in their own words.

A contract labor father of six workers under fourteen years said, "In the city, I'd have to get me a job and work the year round. This way, in the country all the kids and the woman works and in the summer make more'n me carryin' a dinner pail the whole year. Kids no work in city jes go to school."

The mother of two workers under sixteen years said, "We come to beets the reason clothes cost so much. Not much work in city. No work for chillins in city. We come ten years a'ready. Now chillins all grow up. Next year all get jobs in city. We come to beets no more."

Another contract father said: "We wouldn't do beets if it wasn't for them kids. They do work jes the same like me."

Grower parents who did all their own hand work, said: "Kinder eat—must work."

"If I can't work my chillins in beets, I'd lose my farm and the county'd haf to keep us."

An American farmer said: "Children are cheap labor. They get nothing out of it but board and clothes."

Company officials speaking of the matter said:

"Big families need to secure beet work because it brings larger returns to them than anything else they get to do."

"The advantage of the family is that they *all* work."

"We prefer families . . . All big families want large acreages."

The hand work in beets is considered highly suitable to children under sixteen years of age, as expressed by persons of different interests in the matter.

A company official said: "Beet work can be done by children all right. Of course six, seven, and eight year olds are too young, but they are not common."

A field man stated: "Children can do beet work, but no child under ten should be allowed to work in beets."

A school man: "No child should work beets before he is twelve."

A grower of beets: "Me sorry kinder works so hard in beets but without them no make a life."

An officer of a cooperative beet growers' association said: "No child under twelve has any business to work in beets any time and fourteen years is better."

Undoubtedly, the labor of children in the sugar beet fields means larger money returns to the parent, the grower and the company.

How Children Lived in the Beet Fields — Housing of contract labor families in the beet fields is undeniably bad and is recognized by all concerned as a difficult matter to adjust satisfactorily. The contract

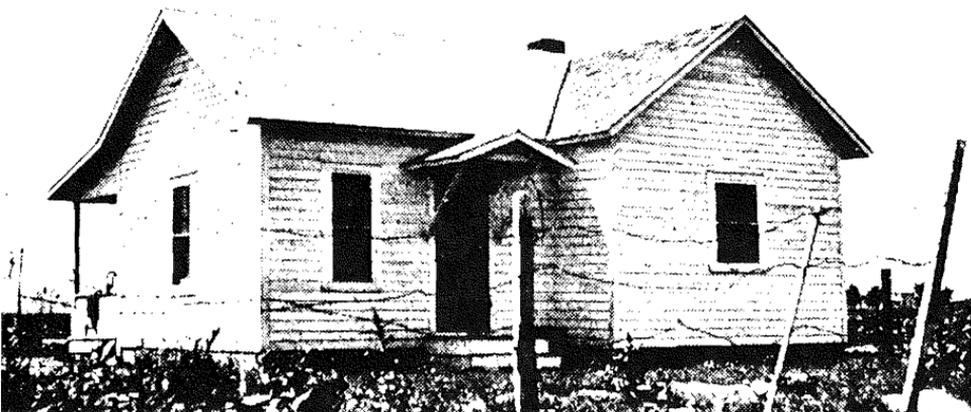
between the grower and the father of the labor family stipulates that the grower shall provide "reasonable living accommodations" for his labor. This phrase may be and is variously interpreted. Many growers find it impossible to expend any large amount of money on a purely temporary shelter. All of the 297 contract labor families, except five, however, were provided with some kind of living accommodations free of charge. These five families for one or another reason rented houses near their work.

The characteristic shack provided for families working in the beet fields is a cheaply-built, unfinished, unceiled shelter of one, two or three rooms, often covered with tar or building-paper. Of the total 297 contract labor families, 233 were living in shacks, 79 of which were covered with tar-paper. Other families lived as follows: 13 families occupied farm houses; 21 occupied former farm houses which were often in advanced stages of dilapidation; 2 lived in barns; 1 had rooms in a farm house; 26 occupied homes which were considered good enough to be designated as cottages; and 1 lived in a building formerly used as a granary. A cottage was interpreted to mean a dwelling of two or more rooms, well-built, painted on the outside and finished within, having the appearance of a home rather than of a temporary shelter. Dwellings which had been constructed recently and were still in good condition were designated as "new." Of these there were 53. All others, in various stages of good and bad repair, were designated as "old." There were 244 of these.

Several of the contract families came from comfortable homes and expressed dissatisfaction with living in the shacks. For example, one father said: "These farmers build houses for beet-tenders just like for chickens." Another father in telling how the rain beat through the sides and roof of their shack, "They expect us to live just like pigs."

Among the best living accommodations were three new well-built cottages. One had been recently built by the land owner to replace an old soddy, formerly used by the beet family. It was a three room frame cottage, well-built, finished within and painted on the outside. It was occupied during the season of 1923 by a family of nine: father, mother and seven children, ranging from one to thirteen years of age. The second was a three-room cottage built by an absentee owner especially for his beet labor, at a cost of \$1,175.00. It was a well-constructed frame house, finished inside with varnished woodwork, painted walls and oiled floors. It was occupied by a contract labor family of eight. The third cottage had been built by the owner for a relative who did his hand work in beets. It was a small two-room, frame cottage, and was occupied by a family of four.

During the summer four new cottages on farms owned by a land company came under observation. They were new two-room frame



*A frame cottage proved one of the best houses occupied by contract labor families
... (Below) One of the worst shelters was near stagnant water.*



structures, painted and ceiled. On two of the farms the cottages were occupied by Mexican contract labor of six each in the family. On another farm the cottage was occupied by the hired man, the contract labor family of seven living in a shack in the field. The fourth was occupied by a relative, while the beet family of twelve lived in an old two-room shack.

Many shacks were located in the yard with the home of the grower. In such cases the surroundings were of course as good as those of the grower's family. Sometimes they were placed farther back in the farmyard or corral, in the fields or along the irrigation ditches. Odors from corrals were sometimes almost unbearable. The young American mother coming to beets for the first time said the stench from the barnyard, especially in wet weather, made her so sick she could not eat. Another family was found to be living in a two-room shelter which was an extension of the barn. When the family was first visited, there was a pool of stagnant water covering about a quarter of an acre and extending to the very door. At three subsequent visits made at intervals during the summer and fall the stagnant water was still standing. The father said, "Too much steenk, maka me seek." Other families living along irrigation ditches complained of being almost marooned when the fields were irrigated. Many shacks, however, were located on dry, well-drained plots.

An attempt was made to classify dwellings into: (1) those considered adequate for the family's needs; and (2) those inadequate for their needs. Things considered in this classification were number of rooms provided in relation to number of persons in the family, number of doors and windows, and whether or not the house was properly screened. Under this arbitrary classification, 89 dwellings were considered adequate and 208 were considered inadequate for the needs of the family.

In the 297 shelters used by the contract labor families there was a total of 835 rooms, an average of 2.5 persons for each room. There was an average of 5.1 persons to each bedroom. In some cases rooms other than bedrooms were used for sleeping purposes. Accurate account was kept of their number. Besides the 415 bedrooms, 113 other rooms were used for sleeping, making a total of 528 sleeping rooms used by 2,141 persons or an average of 4 persons to each room used for sleeping. These 113 extra sleeping rooms were usually general living rooms also used as kitchen and dining room.

The majority of the beet shacks were either of one or two rooms with large families of children crowded into them. A smaller number of families had three or four rooms. Only seven families had more than four rooms. The number of families with the number of rooms per family is here given:

Number of families living in 1 room	36
Number of families living in 2 rooms	173
Number of families living in 3 rooms	52
Number of families living in 4 rooms	29
Number of families living in 5 rooms	5
Number of families living in 6 rooms	1
Number of families living in 7 rooms	1

297

The significant thing is that all the families occupying one-room shacks had no bedroom of any kind. One room served as general living room, kitchen and dining room, as well as bedroom. Families of 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 persons were found living under these conditions.

For example, there was a family consisting of the father and mother and five children ranging from seven to seventeen years living in one room. Another family of eight was living in a one-room granary. Besides the father and mother there were six children ranging from two to eleven years. There was one door, unscreened; one half-sized and a full-sized window, also unscreened. A family of nine persons in one room consisted of children ranging from one year and five months to thirteen years, and the father and mother. A family of ten in one room included the father and mother and eight children ranging from three to nineteen years. A family of eleven persons in one room included the father and mother and children ranging from one to nineteen years of age. Needless to say, any attempt at good housekeeping under these crowded conditions was futile.

As many as fifteen persons were living in two rooms. A family consisting of parents and eight children, making ten in the household, had taken in a family of five, making fifteen persons in all. A family of twelve consisting of father and mother and children ranging from one to fifteen years was living in a two-room shack. The mother was awaiting confinement.

A family of eight and two others were living in a one-room, tar-paper shack. Besides the father and mother, there were six small children ranging from a tiny baby to a boy nine years of age. Two men had joined the family to help them with the beets. A small canvas shelter was attached to the house as a sleeping room for the two men. When it rained, they were all obliged to sleep in the one room. The mother said plaintively, "Seems as if the floor is only beds. The owner has a room for everything, but for us one room must do for all." Then, resignedly, "We are poor people – it must be so."

An unusually fine family consisting of husband and wife and six children was living in an old granary. The outside had once been covered with tar-paper, but this was nearly all torn off. This family of eight was living in one room with only one door, which was not screened. Two sides of the shelter had no window of any kind. Three very small windows served as a means of light and ventilation. The roof leaked.

A family of six, man and wife and four children, aged seventeen, sixteen, eight and a baby of only a few days, was living in two one-room tar-paper shacks. One served as a sleeping room, the other as a general living room, kitchen and dining room. The mother was doing the family washing and the baby lay on the table. With some difficulty, the visitor managed to squeeze into the room. A terrific wind and dust storm shook the frail shelter. The mother explained that sometimes at night when the winds were blowing, she got up and held the baby in her arms fearing the shack would blow away.

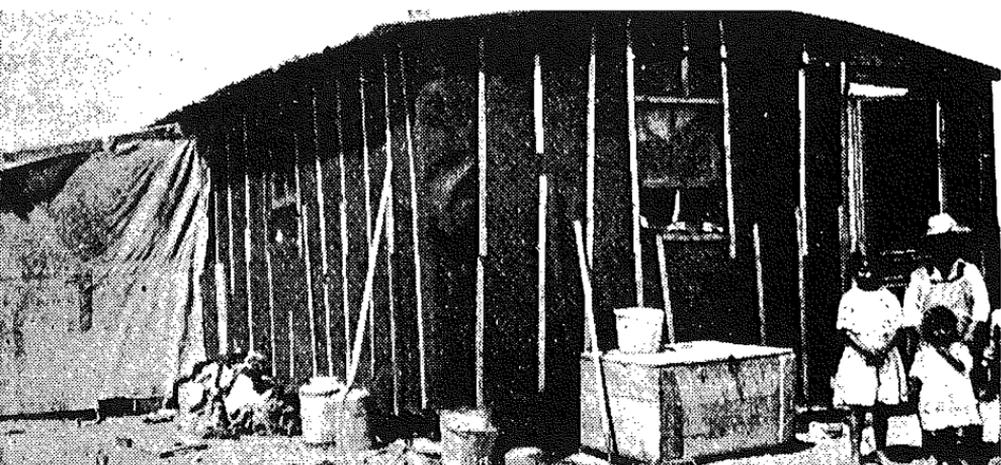
Most families coming to beets brought with them a few pieces of furniture. A typical beet shack contained a good stove, a table or a box serving for one, long benches or chairs, a bed or two, a cot or pallets such as are used by the Mexicans. Other boxes served as cupboards. Only a few families brought with them all their furniture. These were people who planned to stay in the country after beet harvest, perhaps to rent a farm or go to a nearby town. Sometimes the stove was provided by the farmer and left in the beet shack during the winter. Many of the contract labor families keep the same furniture from year to year for the express purpose of using it in the beet fields.

Mothers' pathetic attempts to make beet shacks into homes were not uncommon. A number of families had themselves built on an additional room, having prevailed upon the grower to buy the necessary lumber. One family built on an extra room, three in all, built in cupboards and painted all their furniture the same shade of blue. Another mother tried to cover up the dirty, unceiled walls by papering them with clean newspapers.

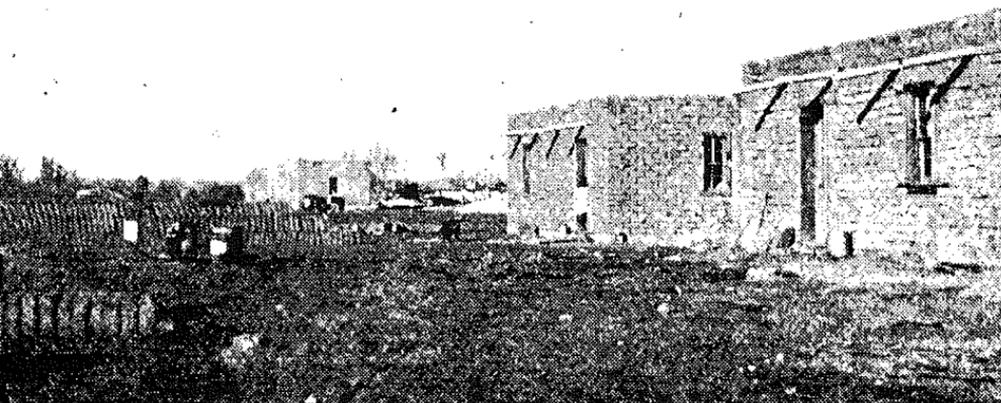
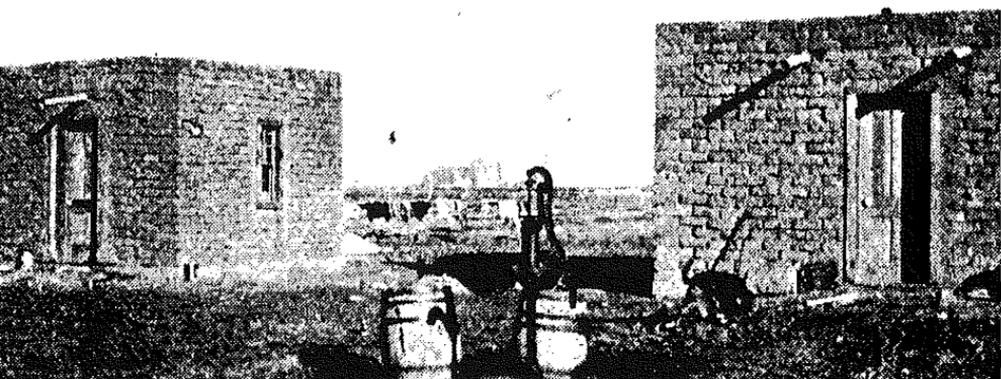
A family living in a three-room tar-paper shack placed the cook stove out in the yard with a wind-break around it. Inside the stove had heated up the shack so as to make it unbearable. Each room had one small window. The mother had trained vines over the windows in an effort to make the home more attractive, but these served to keep out any air that otherwise might have come in.

Flowers or growing vines were tenderly cared for, often paled in to keep them from chickens or pigs. One family lived in a one-room shack with an open lean-to attached. In the sod roof of the shed the mother had planted pumpkin seeds, the vines from which soon covered the whole ugly lean-to with large leaves. The hard ground underneath was carefully swept. This little "patio" was the only place where the family might go to escape the hot rays of the sun and intense heat.

Under such trying conditions housework was difficult. Not only were most of the mothers busy in the field, leaving some of the housework to the smaller children, but overcrowding and lack of any facilities made good housekeeping impossible even among people noted for their order and cleanliness. In spite of this, many of the shacks were immaculately kept. Mothers, after working in the field all week, stayed



Tar paper shack for beet workers . . . (Below) Adobe structures for contract labor at Scottsbluff.



home Saturday morning to clean up the house, scrub, do the weekly washing, and bake enough for the coming week. On the other hand, with mothers in the field, many homes were unkempt, chickens allowed to run in, floors filthy, unwashed dishes stacked on dirty tables and remains of hasty meals lying about.

Toilet facilities in the beet fields were sometimes inadequate and unsanitary. The toilet in almost universal use was the open-back outdoor privy. A total of 291 contract labor families were provided with these. Twenty-eight families shared this facility with one other family; and one shared it with two other families. Six families had no toilet facilities of any kind. Sometimes the outdoor privies were in very bad condition; some were flimsy and temporarily built; others were totally inadequate, without seats or doors, or with canvas bags hung in place of walls or doors.

Poor ventilation and lighting of beet shacks and other dwellings in the beet fields were common. The windows in these structures were frequently half-size, many times with only one in a room; sometimes two. Two-thirds of the shacks had only one door. In all fairness to the growers, it must be said that families using these houses sometimes boarded up windows or covered them with canvas or old bags which, in the fall, made the place easier to heat, but prevented circulation of air. All houses were lighted by kerosene lamps.

The number of doors and windows in all the shelters used by contract labor families was ascertained definitely. There was a total of 389 doors, 278 of which were screened. There were 1,171 windows and a little more than half, or 649, were screened. Screens were not by any means furnished for all the families, and often those provided were inadequate. For some families where there were many little children, field men required the owners to provide screens.

The houses used by the families of 58 growers, farm owners or tenants, were in almost every instance better than those provided for contract labor families. Only nine of the 58 growers were living in shelters deserving the name "shack," while the remainder, 49 in all, lived in farm houses of from three to seven rooms. Most of these were in a fair state of repair. About a third were considered as new, and two-thirds old, as the terms are here used.

It may be said that children of beet growers in the valley are as well housed as children of other farm families in that section of the state. However, children of labor families are generally poorly housed in cheaply-built structures, and are living under crowded conditions, with inadequate facilities for sanitation.

Source and Kind of Food Supply — One factor which draws contract labor families to the country is a belief that they will be able to produce a major part of their living while there, including a bountiful supply of

fresh milk, eggs and vegetables. Careful inquiry was made of each family as to garden, number of cows, pigs, and fowls owned by it. In this way, it was possible to determine with a reasonable degree of accuracy whether the family was able to produce the major part of its living or not. Using this method, it is estimated that of the 297 contract labor families 32 or about 10 percent produced the major part of their living, and that 265 or about 90 percent did not.

Some families coming to beets have enough money saved to enable them to buy food supplies for cash until such time as they receive their first pay. Others have no such resource and are obliged to buy for credit, which is sometimes guaranteed by the grower or the fieldman. Of the 297 families of this study, 85 or about 28 percent, bought mainly with cash. The remainder, 212 or 72 percent, bought mainly on credit.

Not all contract labor families had gardens, although they were generally provided with a plot for a garden. Some families came to the fields too late to plant them. Others were provided with a plot of ground on which they did not think a garden would grow. Still others lost their gardens through ravages of farm animals or fowls, through drowning out by heavy rains, or by hail. Some of the families reported that after working long hours in the field they were too tired to care for gardens of their own. In all, 226 families, or roughly three-fourths, had some sort of a garden, while 71, or one-fourth, had not. Seventeen had potato patches large enough to be enumerated separately.

Fresh milk was not available for use by all the families. Of the 297 contract labor families, 215, or 72 percent, had fresh milk; and 28 percent had not. Of the 215 families having milk, 107 owned one cow or more, 89 bought milk from nearby farmers, and 17 were given milk free of charge by the grower for whom they worked. Some growers set aside a cow for the use of their contract labor family; others gave them milk. Only a small number, nine families in all, reported the use of canned milk.

During the excessive heat of the summer months, many families made no attempt to keep butter. As far as is known, no family had ice or any other means of preserving food. It was not surprising, then, that more than half, or 176 families, reported they did not use any butter during their stay in the country. Some of the 121 having butter used it immediately after buying or churning. This means they had butter only one or two days in the week.

Besides the 108 cows owned by 104 contract labor families, some also owned pigs or fowls. Twenty-seven families owned 51 pigs; and 178 families owned about 5,519 fowls including chickens, geese, ducks and turkeys. Of the 297 families, 119 had no fowls, 193 no cow, and 240 no pig, although the possession of any of these would have been an economic benefit to them.

Practically all the families lived mainly on vegetables such as potatoes, beans and onions, supplemented once a week or more by fresh meat. There was almost no fresh fruit, only eleven families reporting they had fresh fruit at some time during the season. Among the fruits reported were cherries, huckleberries, apples, bananas and melons. In addition a few families used canned fruit brought with them from home.

The following menus were typical of the principal meal eaten by families working in the beet field. (1) Vegetable stew, bread, jam, coffee. (2) Potatoes, eggs, bread. (3) Fried potatoes, bread, canned cherries, tea. (4) Potatoes, cabbage, wieners, bread, cheese. (5) Beans, eggs, bread, jam. (6) Red beans, peppers, tortillos. (7) Bread, meat, dill pickles. (8) Bread, milk. (9) Bread, eggs, onions, milk.

Families who worked all day in the field frequently had one or two lunches besides their three regular daily meals. These were prepared by the mother before she left in the morning or by a "little mother" and were eaten in the field. Sometimes if the family had gone out at a very early hour the first lunch was eaten at 8 or 9 o'clock in the morning, the other in the middle of the afternoon. Long hours of strenuous work in the out-of-doors made a plentiful supply of wholesome food necessary.

Water Supply — An adequate supply of water was available for all of the contract labor families. The well was the common source of water supply. Many families were provided with separate wells; others living in the yard with the grower used his well. Of the 297 families, 233 or 78 percent had an easily accessible supply of good water. The remainder, 64 families or 22 percent, were obliged to carry it for varying distances, none of them excessive except in so far as the work of carrying water was left to the mother or children. Then it often proved an added hardship. Many mothers complained of the hard work involved in carrying water for household purposes.

Participation in Community Life — Contract labor families do not become a part of the rural community. Fathers and mothers generally are ineligible to vote and their families participate very little in any community social activity. This is true also of many of the beet grower families which come from the same racial group, many of whom were formerly contract laborers. Few of the contract labor children attend the rural school or church, if there is one, or take part in any club work that may be organized for children in the neighborhood.

Nationality is the principal factor determining neighborliness in the rural communities covered by this study. Between a contract labor family and a grower family, if of the same nationality, there is usually a friendly neighborly association. There is little consciousness on the

part of the owner or tenant of social superiority. This is especially true of the compact Russian German group. The children of the contract labor family are on a social level with those of their employer of the same nationality. This is not true of the children of Mexican contract labor families. They are always employed by other nationalities, American, Russian German or Japanese. Even the children of the groups do not mingle.

Contract labor families brought from distant places do not enjoy the same degree of neighborliness as those from nearby centers. For example, contract labor families from Scottsbluff, most of whom were in the country immediately surrounding that city, reported the highest percentage of neighbors of any group. This was no doubt due to the fact that many of the tenant and owner families were of the same dominant nationality, Russian German, as well as that these families were placed in a community where they are more or less known. On the other hand, fewer families from Lincoln reported that they had one or more neighbors, with the exception that when Lincoln families were placed near each other, there was usually a friendly feeling between them and interchange of visits.

Only two contract labor families reported participation in any social activity in the neighborhood, such as school entertainments. One was in a well-organized community where there was a consolidated school. The superintendent of the school reported that the beet growing and beet working families, largely Russian German, took a small part in the plans for entertainment or club work made for the development of social life in the district. A great effort was being made in this community to interest all the immigrant families in the school. Although the fathers were largely non-citizens, they were invited to attend meetings where there was discussion of school policies. While many could not vote they were invited to express opinions, and to assist in matters of common interest not requiring the ballot. Instruction was given regarding citizenship. This kind of work was not, however, general throughout the beet districts.

Church Attendance — Church attendance of contract labor families in the beet district depended in some degree upon whether or not the family had available means of conveyance to nearby towns. There were practically no churches in the open country. The tendency was that a family accustomed to attending church elsewhere was the one most likely to do so while in the rural community. Beet-tender families often went with the growers, especially if the two families were of the same faith.

Contract labor families in the environs of Scottsbluff showed a higher percentage of church attendance than any other group. This was due perhaps to the fact that these families were largely from

Scottsbluff, and members of the several churches there. The distance was not so great and families usually had some means of conveyance. Fully two-thirds of the total number of contract labor families reported no church attendance during their stay in the rural community.

Means of Conveyance — It is of considerable value to any contract labor family to have a means of conveyance of its own. Half of the total number, or 149, had some means of conveyance; the other half, or 148, were dependent upon others, usually the grower. It was generally understood that if they had no means of their own, the grower took some member to the nearby trading point for supplies once a week or more if necessary.

The trading point is frequently a sort of social center where families meet to exchange friendly greetings and experiences. Once a week at least, it was necessary for some member of the family to go there for supplies. Nearly always the father went, less frequently the mother, and sometimes the children, depending usually upon whether the family had its own means of conveyance or was dependent upon the grower. In any case, a day spent in town was regarded as a real holiday and frequently about the only social life many of them had.

Reading Matter — So little reading matter was found in the homes of the beet working families that it could almost be said there was none. Only five families reported that they received a newspaper regularly. One family secured a paper whenever they went to town. This is all the more interesting when one recalls that many of these same families were regular subscribers for the daily newspapers during the winter. This was especially true of the Lincoln families, many of whom said they greatly missed the paper to which they were accustomed.

One family said they read a Sunday school paper regularly, two families had school books, two had magazines, one Mexican family had a well-worn Spanish book. One ten year old boy, born in this country, did not know the meaning of the word newspaper. On the other hand, many children spoke wistfully of books and magazines. One young boy said he often went to the "boss's" house to read.

In general, contract labor families, especially those working at some distance from their homes, participated very little in any form of community or neighborhood social activity. Many growers who had formerly been contract laborers participated as little. The few communities which have organized themselves in such ways as to encourage their participation have made very slight progress in social solidarity.

Where Children Lived Outside the Beet Season — The majority of contract labor families in the valley in 1923 had moved to the beet

fields from urban centers, defined elsewhere as cities, towns and villages. That was true whether they had children who were required to work in beets or whether all workers were adults.

Of the 297 contract labor families of this study, only 24 or 8 percent had spent the previous winter in the open country. Only twelve had lived in very small communities defined for the purpose of this report as hamlets. There were seventeen families who had lived in villages, forty-three in towns, and 201 in cities.

Nebraska furnished 256 families out of the 297, or 86 percent. For several years the largest number from any one city were shipped from Lincoln. However, as families went into the valley year after year, many settled for the winter in nearby towns and villages, until in 1923 a goodly supply of both Russian-German and Mexican labor was available within the beet district itself.

The 256 families who moved from points in Nebraska came from (1) outside the beet district: Lincoln 70, Hastings 11, Sutton 3, Omaha 1; (2) within the beet district: Scottsbluff 88, Bayard 23, Gering 16, Minatare 5, Bridgeport 4, Mitchell 4, Morrill 1, Haig 1, Hershey 5, farms 24.

New Mexico furnished the largest number next to Nebraska, 11 Spanish-American and Mexican families. In addition, there were 3 Mexican families from Mexico and 2 from Texas. From Wyoming there were 10 families; from Colorado 9; Kansas 5, and Montana 1.

Inquiry was made of all the families as to where they had lived when they made their first trip to the beet fields. One hundred sixty had come from points in Nebraska, while others had come from thirteen states, Mexico, Canada and Russia.

	First Season	1923 Season		First Season	1923 Season
Nebraska					
Lincoln	71	70	Colorado	56	9
Scottsbluff	35	88	Wyoming	12	10
Bayard	14	23	Kansas	9	5
Gering	8	16	Montana	5	1
Hastings	7	11	Texas	4	2
Sutton	2	3	New Mexico	9	11
Minatare	0	5	Illinois	3	0
Bridgeport	1	4	Minnesota	3	0
Mitchell	6	4	Wisconsin	2	0
Morrill	4	1	Michigan	2	0
Hershey	1	5	Washington	2	0
Haig	1	1	Idaho	1	0
McGrew	1	0	Oklahoma	1	0
Omaha	0	1	Old Mexico	21	3
Alliance	1	0	Canada	6	0
Norfolk	1	0	Russia	1	0
Farms	0	24			
Unknown	7	0			
				137	41
	160	256			

In the matter of transportation for their first season in beets 32 families reported they had moved to the fields at their own expense; 72 at the expense of the farmer for whom they worked; and 193 that they had been shipped in by the company. For the season of 1923 there were 31 families who had moved at their own expense; 146 at the expense of the farmer, and 120 had been shipped in by the company

The permanency of the family home is recognized as an important factor in the life and well being of the children. Effort was made, therefore, to determine to what degree each of the 297 families of contract labor had a fixed abiding place. For the purpose of this study a fixed abiding place meant that the family had lived in the same town at least during the two previous winters and expected to go back. No fixed abiding place meant that the family had spent the past two winters in different places and did not know where they would go after beets.

On such arbitrary classification, there were only 78 families out of 297, or 26.3 percent, who had *no* fixed abiding place. They involved, however, more than 200 child workers under sixteen years of age.

On the other hand there were 219 or 73.6 percent who had a fixed abiding place. Of these 136 lived in the beet districts and 83 outside. With a few exceptions all spent the entire summer in the open country. In the season of 1922 a number of the families living permanently in Scottsbluff returned to the city during a month or six weeks in the mid-summer; but during the season of 1923 practically all stayed in the country, returning after work was finished in the fall. A village paper on November 20th referred to the return in this wise: "Now that the beet season is drawing to a close, it is quite a common sight to see the families of beet tenders moving to winter locations."

About half of the families reported they owned homes. This meant that they either had a home paid for or were making payments on some kind of a house and lot. There were 151 reported as home owners; 113 renters; and 33 as having occupied free shelter during the winter prior to the season of 1923.

Families settling near the fields have established themselves in colonies in nearby towns and villages. Practically every trading center in the beet district had its "Russiatown" or "Little Mexico." Scottsbluff, a thriving city in the very heart of the Scotts Bluff County beet district, has both. Gering, the county seat, located three miles south and across the North Platte River, has a Russian-German settlement. Bayard, a growing town in the heart of the Morrill County beet area, has two Mexican colonies. Minatare, a village 11 miles east of Scottsbluff, has a growing colony of Mexicans, and Mitchell, a town 12 miles northwest, has a few of both Russian-Germans and Mexicans, but not a colony of either.

The Russian-German colony at Scottsbluff is the largest in the

valley. Families are said to have settled there first in 1904, though they did not come in any large numbers until 1910. It is not unlike the colony at Lincoln, established as early as 1876. About 2,500, or 37.7 percent, of Scottsbluff's population of 7,000 belong to this group. Beginning at the railroad tracks on the south the settlement has extended north to 20th Street, and from 8th Avenue to the city limits on the east.

The most prosperous section of the district lies to the north. The poorest section lies between the railroad and the main thoroughfare leading east past the sugar factory. In the poorer parts, many shacks not unlike beet shacks are built close together. Full size lots were bought in the first place, but owners have divided them according to their economic status and personal desire in the matter. In addition to his shack and often a summer kitchen for his own family, the owner has allowed one or two other families to build on the original lot. As a result, families are crowded together in small quarters all out of keeping with the space otherwise available for a single family unit.

As families became more prosperous or as they desired more comfortable places in which to live, they moved to the north, often across the main thoroughfare where they built cottages on full sized city lots; but the group has remained closely compact within well defined boundaries. They have built churches, conduct their own places of business, send their children to public schools, and enjoy a closely knit community life.

While many have bought their homes or have bought a lot and built a house of some kind, in the main their property does not pay taxes in proportion to those paid by the city as a whole. For instance, other properties of Scottsbluff School District pay by far the larger portion of the local school funds. The Report of Taxation of Foreigners in Scottsbluff District furnished by a school official gives the following information on the subject:

"Number of families who pay no tax	143	Number of children	410
Number of families who pay tax	165	Number of children	479
	308		889

"Total assessed valuation of above list \$ 219,645.00
 Levy 15.5 mills, \$3,404.50 or \$3.83 per child.

"Total valuation of school district 8,700,925.00
 Total of all school children 2,805.00
 Levy 15.5 mills, \$134,864.00 or \$48.07 per child."

The school official stated, "It is evident that the other taxpayers of the district are contributing \$44.24 of taxes for each one of these children. . . . This gives at least a glimpse into the burden of taxation we have to carry in order to care for these children."

A comparatively small colony at Gering is located near the sugar factory. This colony conducts a parochial school which attracts pupils from farms nearby as well as those of the neighborhood.

In their community life as well as in their homes the Russian-Germans in the valley, erroneously called "Russians," are perpetuating many of their ancestral characteristics and points of view. They are proud of the fact that they are Germans and not Russians. The name Russian German¹¹ has been given to the group of former German subjects who migrated from Germany to Russia in the years 1763 to 1776 at the invitation of Catherine the Great. Large numbers settled in the fertile valley of the Volga, until then practically uninhabited. Catherine, anxious to have the land developed and naturally kindly disposed toward the German people, offered them many inducements to colonize in Russia. They were given capital with which to aid in their settlement without interest for ten years; exemption from all taxes for thirty years; freedom in communal government, in worship, and use of their own language; and also exemption from military service. Many German families (the movement was almost entirely a family one) migrated to the Volga region.

In Russia¹² the German immigrants retained their patriarchal type of family life, marrying only among themselves and forming a homogeneous group, largely untouched by Russian influence, and clinging to their own customs, language and religion.

At the time of the liberation of the Russian serf a change was made in the status of the German colonists. They were deprived of their former freedom of self-government and exemption from military service. Dissatisfied with these conditions, they began to leave Russia in 1871, the movement being still a family one. Many emigrated to the United States, Canada and South America. These are the Russian-Germans who with their children have come into the valley to work beets and have established colonies of "Russian beet tenders."

In the matter of bringing their families to the fields and settling for the winter in nearby towns, the Mexicans are comparatively a new group. Families in any large numbers have been shipped in only since 1920. Mexican colonies in the valley include persons born in Mexico of Indian and Mexican stock, persons born in the United States of the same stock, and also Spanish Americans, who are native born of Spanish and Indian stock. All these are commonly called Mexicans.

Prior to the season of 1923, the Great Western Sugar Company experimented in establishing a colony of Mexican families on the outskirts of a village in the beet district. From the standpoint of labor supply, at least, the experiment proved a success. In 1923 the colony was enlarged and others established in the valley. The company set aside a tract of land at Scottsbluff and at Minatare. It sold lots to Mexicans for a nominal price of about \$50.00, giving them five years in which to pay. The soil was used for making brick, out of which 'dobs were built at a cost of about \$75.00 each. At intervals between weeding and harvest both at Scottsbluff and at Minatare, Mexicans were seen

busily at work making brick, mixing the dirt by means of a large hopper, and moulding it in frames. A few days later, rows upon rows of brick were to be seen drying in the sun. Still later a new 'dobe of two rooms or a double structure of four rooms sprang into view. In this wise ten or a dozen 'dobes were erected in time for families to move in after harvest.

Invariably Mexicans live in the most undesirable section of the town or village, as commonly measured by local opinion. Their children attend the public school and only in rare instances are separated from other children into classes or rooms by themselves. These families have little opportunity, however, to attend church. There is a church at Bayard which provides the services of a priest at intervals. Otherwise, as far as the matter came under observation, families attended no church regularly. They do not conduct stores, not even for their own group, and with the exception of one restaurant were not found in any established business.

NOTES

¹ Esther S. Anderson, *The Sugar Beet Industry of Nebraska*, University of Nebraska, Conservation and Survey Division Bulletin 9 (Lincoln, 1937), 17. Anderson was assistant professor of geography at the University of Nebraska when she compiled this report.

² *Ibid.*, 19.

³ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Esther S. Anderson, "The Beet Sugar Industry of Nebraska," reprinted from *Economic Geography*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1925):381.

⁶ *Uniform Child Labor Laws*, Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Conference of the National Child Labor Committee (Philadelphia, 1911), 32.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Sara A. Brown and Robie O. Sargent, *Children Working in the Sugar Beet Fields of the North Platte Valley of Nebraska* (New York, N.Y.: National Child Labor Committee, 1924), v.

⁹ United States Department of Agriculture, Weather Bureau, Cooperative Observers Meteorological Record, Scottsbluff Station, Scottsbluff, Nebraska, A.B. McCoskey, observer.

¹⁰ Authors Brown and Sargent italicized certain words in this quote.

¹¹ Hattie Plum Williams, *A Social Study of the Russian German*, University Studies, vol. 16, no. 3 (Univ. of Nebr., July 1916).

¹² Gregor Alexinsky, *Russia and Europe* (New York, N.Y.: Chas. Scribner & sons, 1917). Translated from the manuscript by Bernard Miall.