

Ranchers, Nationals In Perfect Harmony On Labor Agreement

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9-5-68

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MERTZON — The labor shortage out here is getting worse. Ranchers have to hunt for extra help like their forefathers once threshed the bushes for wild cattle. And at the rate stock hands are disappearing, anybody from schoolmarms to fry cooks is considered to be a likely replacement prospect.

Passport Mexican Nationals are about the only steady hands left. The country is dotted with families legally imported from Mexico. These Juans, Felipes and Pedros have now been north of the Rio Grande long enough to have developed a perfect understanding with their bosses. An unwritten contract between the two parties is as firmly entrenched as the calluses on a shoe cobbler's hand.

Six basic points make up the agreement.

(1) The boss is to supply food and lodging for the worker, his friends, and any of his or his wife's families, extending to and including 17th cousins.

(2) All church and state holidays of both the United States and Mexico must be celebrated. An extra day after each celebration is reserved as a recovery period. For extra big fiestas (and that takes in every holiday except Pancake Tuesday and the Jewish Washerwomen's' Festival) an additional 72 hours of rest may be required.

(3) The employe shall have the privilege to own as many pets as he desires. No amount is specified, but it is generally agreed that every passport family should have a minimum of six pet goats and two dozen cats and mongrel dogs.

(4) A portion of each month is devoted to meeting the medical needs of the family. The employer is required only to provide for the transportation to and from the medical center, to arrange for the necessary money, and to spend the day serving as a guide and interpreter. Occasionally the boss is expected to pay for an ailing relative's operation over in Mexico, but normally the limit of his responsibility is caring for the health of, say, seven or eight kids, the wife, and of course the worker himself.

(5) Without any reservations, the patron is the hombre's banker. He must be ready day or night to provide instant cash. Labor advances are drawn to cover re-advances. Security or interest must never be mentioned. Specific pay-off date are unheard of.

(6) The modern Mexican ranch hand has to have an automobile. It is not the rancher's responsibility to provide a vehicle. It is understood, however, that such minor details as endorsing the financial agreements and underwriting all repairs and expenses are to fall under the scope of the employer.

From this agreement there flourishes one of the fairest labor management contracts to be found anywhere. The ranchers faithfully stand by their portion of the pact, and when the Mexicans are on the job they follow it to the letter. The time may be near when the workers will take advantage of us, but at present the Shortgrass Country is one of the few places in the world where an employer has a firm hold on his employes.