



PROYECTO CAMPESINO

60 YEARS HISTORY AND COMMITMENT FOR EQUALITY
AND JUSTICE IN THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY, CALIFORNIA

By Eduardo Stanley

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Proyecto Campesino, also known by its original name, Farm Labor Committee, was a program of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). Founded in 1917 by a group of Quakers in Philadelphia, AFSC began its service by placing conscientious objectors (people who refuse to be a part of the armed forces based on their pacifist beliefs) in France at the end of World War I. AFSC slowly began expanding throughout Europe and then throughout the United States with the mission of working in support of those in greater need and promoting peace.

Proyecto Campesino developed its activities between 1955 and 2015 out of Tulare County in California's San Joaquin Valley.

Guided by the spiritual, moral, and social values of the AFSC, Proyecto Campesino implemented diverse social projects, supporting and laboring in causes and movements in favor of the most underprivileged groups and against injustice and inequality.

BACKGROUND

In the 1930s, Quakers in California were very active in cities like Pasadena, Berkeley, and San José, where they spread their pacifist principles. In 1937, they established a committee in the Bay Area to receive and assist German and Austrian refugees.

The Friends Center of San Francisco (Friends is what the Quakers call themselves) was created in 1940. Between then and 1942, the Center organized workcamps to support refugees and youth, who at the same time helped with the construction of a shelter for the displaced.

The Center also provided support to conscientious objectors, and in 1942, the Center became the AFSC's Regional Office in San Francisco, chartered by the AFSC Philadelphia-based Board. This regional office would be key to the creation of the Farm Labor Committee, or Proyecto Campesino, in Visalia in 1955.

Those workcamps and other activities were carried out mainly in Hidden Villa Ranch located to the West of Mountain View, south of San Francisco. Hidden Villa Ranch was a property that belonged to Josephine and Frank Duveneck, who dedicated that vast piece of land to hold pacifist and educational activities, including the first residential, multicultural and racially integrated summer camps in the country. The Duvenecks created a nonprofit trust and today, Hidden Villa Ranch continues to hold community service and environmental activities as part of their legacy.

Josephine was part of the Executive Committee (or Board of Directors) of AFSC's Regional Office in San Francisco, and she had a great influence in the coming together of many folks and AFSC programs in California.

During World War II, when the U.S. government forced tens of thousands of people of Japanese ancestry along the West Coast into internment camps, AFSC organized support for those who were interned. In particular, AFSC helped over 4,000 Japanese youth attend colleges on the East Coast and in the Midwest.

AFSC also organized annual Christmas gift campaigns for those interned, and at the end of the war it contributed to the social reintegration of people who had been detained.

“ AFSC helped the Japanese before, during and after their mass arrest. AFSC registered around 4,000 students in 650 colleges in the east and central part of the country, far from the Pacific zone of which they were driven away from along with their families.

In 1958 when I began teaching at San Jose High School in San Jose, California I went to the AFSC office in San Francisco that was located in the Japanese neighborhood. It was there that during World War II, AFSC did its work in supporting the Japanese community. I was very grateful to them for the sweater they gifted me when I was 9 years old in the reclusion camp Heart Mountain, Wyoming. ”

Isao Fujimoto
Professor Emeritus, UC Davis

But the work of AFSC and Josephine Duveneck in the Bay Area wasn't limited to the support of the Japanese and the European refugees. When the war ended and soldiers returned home, U.S. society began to undergo a deep transformation.

One of the effects was the lack of housing and the increase in discrimination complaints in housing and the workplace. Most of those who experienced discriminations were African-Americans and Latinos. Josephine observed that broad Latino sectors lived on the periphery of the cities, where there were hardly any social services or well-paid jobs.

Also, Latinos had little or no representation in government, and their voices were hardly heard. To help this community, Josephine contracted an organizer to help community members organize and decide for themselves what to do. Fred Ross was hired to do this job.

Fred Ross (1910-1992) is considered one of the most important and influential community organizers and motivators to date. In 1948, he co-founded the Community Service Organization (CSO) in Los Angeles, which worked intensely on Latino voter registration, police brutality, political campaigns, and much more. CSO played a role in the birth of the Chicano Movement and contributed to the election of the first Latino councilman in Los Angeles, Edward Roybal, in 1949. After 13 years as councilman, Roybal (1916-2005), was elected to Congress in 1962.

According to several written testimonies, Fred had the skill to discover the “hidden leader” in people and help develop that leadership. Fred was mentored by Saul Alinsky (1909-1972), called the “founder of modern community activism.”

In 1952, Fred began his organizing work in Santa Clara County and in the county seat, San Jose, forming CSOs whose objectives were to demand services and electoral rights.

AFSC hired an assistant for Fred: César Chávez, who would also train at Hidden Villa Ranch and organize dozens of Latinos, the majority of them low- income and marginalized. César (1927-1993) would later become co-founder of the United Farm Workers (UFW) whose historical importance and AFSC support of we shall read further along.

THE CREATION OF THE FARM LABOR COMMITTEE

Motivated by the work of Fred Ross in the San Francisco Bay Area, and as a result of a vast internal dialogue regarding the living conditions of the social sectors that were most in need, AFSC decided to expand its organizing and social work to the San Joaquín Valley. There, in spite of the riches being produced by the agriculture industry, its workers lived—and still live—in poverty.

An AFSC report on the program stated:

“ Friends (Quakers) believe that since ‘God exists in every person’ the social and economic order should work in a way that maintains and enriches everyone’s life, wherever they are. In the

current agriculture labor system, we find various practices that in our opinion, violate this concept of human dignity. These practices are due mostly in part to the farmers being consumed by the economic pressures to maintain their land viable and the public in general is content with ignoring human relations in agriculture so long as the prices for food are reasonable.

In the last decade, the conditions ‘that simply developed’ in the agriculture industry are calling attention to the farming and non-farming communities. The dimension of this problem is clear by the fact that in some counties in California one third of the population depends on the temporary work in the fields through all their life. These workers don’t make more than \$1,500-\$2,000 a year.

During the winter, these counties are obligated to help these families when they are unemployed. This is an indirect subsidy towards cheap agricultural products, however they represent a substantial burden to taxpayers.

To depend on this system tends to naturally depress and pauperize the worker, while at the same time it blinds the farmer in seeing their responsibility in social illnesses that have developed in the farming economy. They do not see poverty and therefore, they do not analyze its causes.

A footnote of the same report clearly explains the status of the farmworkers’ wages:

“ Studies of the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that the wages for working in the fields increased only 33% during 1947 to 1957, while in the manufacturing industry they increased 67%, 76% in construction, 63% in the commerce industry and 42% in the cleaning industry.”

This anonymous analysis—just like other similar ones— found in the AFSC Philadelphia Archives, shows the ongoing interest of AFSC to learn and analyze the living conditions of the community in which it worked.



The small community of Teviston got organized and created their own water district. At the extreme left, Mr. Bard McAllister.

Credit: Courtesy American Friends Service Committee archives

Based on these types of analyses and discussions, AFSC determined that in Tulare County, there was a great need for support to make up for the high levels of poverty, the temporary and badly paid wages, and lack of decent and affordable housing—on top of the serious problem of the distribution of water.

For this reason, AFSC invited Bard McAllister, who had worked in the AFSC Self-Help Housing Program in Pennsylvania (Penn-Craft Community Association), to be in charge of a new project in Visalia, Tulare County.

THE MCALLISTERS

Bard and Olga McAllister arrived in Visalia with their four children in the mid-1950s. In December 1955, Bard was hired as director of AFSC’s Farm Labor Committee, which years later would come to be known as Proyecto Campesino. He wasted no time and immediately got to know the community that he and the Farm Labor Committee would be serving with incredible energy, dedication, and creativity.

“

He would say that to understand farmworkers, he had to be one. But, it wasn’t easy! Bard was a tall, thin, white man and he didn’t speak Spanish!

”

Robert “Bob” Marshall

By then, Mexicans were the dominant workforce in the farming fields of California, slowly replacing Filipinos, Mexican-Americans—especially Texans—and workers from other nationalities that were constantly sought after by the farmers and the farming industries who wanted to maintain low wages and keep labor demands paralyzed.

Bard reached out to the farmworkers and listened to them. Many expressed that having decent housing was one of their biggest desires. They were living in huts or rooms in the worst of conditions without running water or bathrooms.

During a drive through the area, Bard came across Teviston, a small community of African-American farmworkers south of Visalia. They were purchasing the land, but it lacked water, a big problem in the San Joaquin Valley. Bard inspired them and helped them

to organize themselves and begin creating their own water district. After a long process, Teviston finally had water.

This first achievement of the Farm Labor Committee without a doubt stimulated Bard. His way of working with people has one solid foundation:

“ [...] The approach of the Quakers and AFSC when working with those on the margins of society includes personal interaction and friendship, development of leadership within the communities to eventually take the place of AFSC staff, and, where possible, creation of sustainable institutions. ”

Stephen McNeil,
Director of AFSC Peace Projects,
San Francisco

Bard was not a Quaker but Presbyterian, yet he fully identified with the vision and ethics of AFSC’s founders.

In alignment with that vision, Bard and a handful of volunteers developed an original and creative project for farmworkers’ children in 1958. While children often traveled and worked outdoors, they had little connection to the local area as a recreational resource. The new project, The School of Science and Conservation (SCICON), took groups of sixth-grade students to the mountains, under the guidance of a teacher, to experience the riches of nature, which stimulated their thirst for knowledge.

“The children will learn and observe the basic principles of geology, biology, astronomy, ecology and conservation,” Bard wrote in an internal AFSC document. “These children from Tulare County would be invited for one week to a campsite located in the Sierras where they can interact in the process of learning away from the ‘sterile and monotonous education curriculum established by the teachers.’ The reasoning behind the objective of recruiting 6th grade students to participate in the program is very interesting. ‘[...] Because at this stage of a child’s development, curiosity, imagination, attention span and knowledge retention align perfectly.”

The Farm Labor Committee requested and received funds from the San Francisco-based Rosenberg Foundation to put the program in motion. Bard and his allies, such as Mary Ruth Dewey and Charles Rich, started a campaign to gain support from local teachers, administrators, and parents. With strong support from the Tulare Unified School District, SCICON became a reality in 1958.

The first year, the program was a part of the YMCA Camp in Sequoia Lake. But later, Bard contacted a woman by the name of Clemmie Gill, owner of land in the Sierras of Tulare County. Bard explained the project to her and asked if she would like to donate part of her land to house the SCICON educational camp. She agreed and donated 35 acres. After Clemmie’s death, her children donated more land to the project. From then and up to now, SCICON has reached thousands of young students and continues doing so every year.

Bard and AFSC focused on empowering communities of low-income, marginalized people who had little access to services. In the San Joaquin Valley, farmworkers and their families make up a big percentage of the population—working in an industry controlled by rich individuals with the power to influence public policies for their benefit. Many farmworkers, on the other hand, have seen their financial situation decline over time.

Within the agricultural sector, migratory status marginalizes workers even more, denying them access to basic social services, such as unemployment and retirement. This is in spite of their contribution to both funds through their taxes that are automatically deducted from their pay checks. It is no accident that Congress has not reformed an immigration law that would allow these workers to legalize their migratory situation. Placing millions of workers under the “undocumented” category is good business for corporations, particularly farming enterprises. AFSC’s decision to open a project in the San Joaquin Valley was a spot-on decision that carried many challenges.

FARMERS CO-OP

Part of these challenges was the search to change the working/labor relations in the farming industry.

And one of the Farm Labor Committee's attempts in this matter was through the formation of a farmworkers co-op that would allow farmworkers to negotiate directly with their employers, improve their working conditions, and find work throughout the year, among other objectives.

The process of creating a co-op generated rich and ample internal discussion at AFSC about how it could help farmworkers better their living conditions—whether by helping them improve their job opportunities on farms or, by motivating them to leave the industry and seek other employment. Bard was convinced that the co-op was an ideal instrument for farmworkers to improve their living conditions. He negotiated with the Department of Labor in Washington to provide skills training for co-op members and other farmers. A total of 200 day laborers received training in the use of machinery, irrigation techniques, and more. The College of the Sequoias, Visalia's community college, participated in the training.

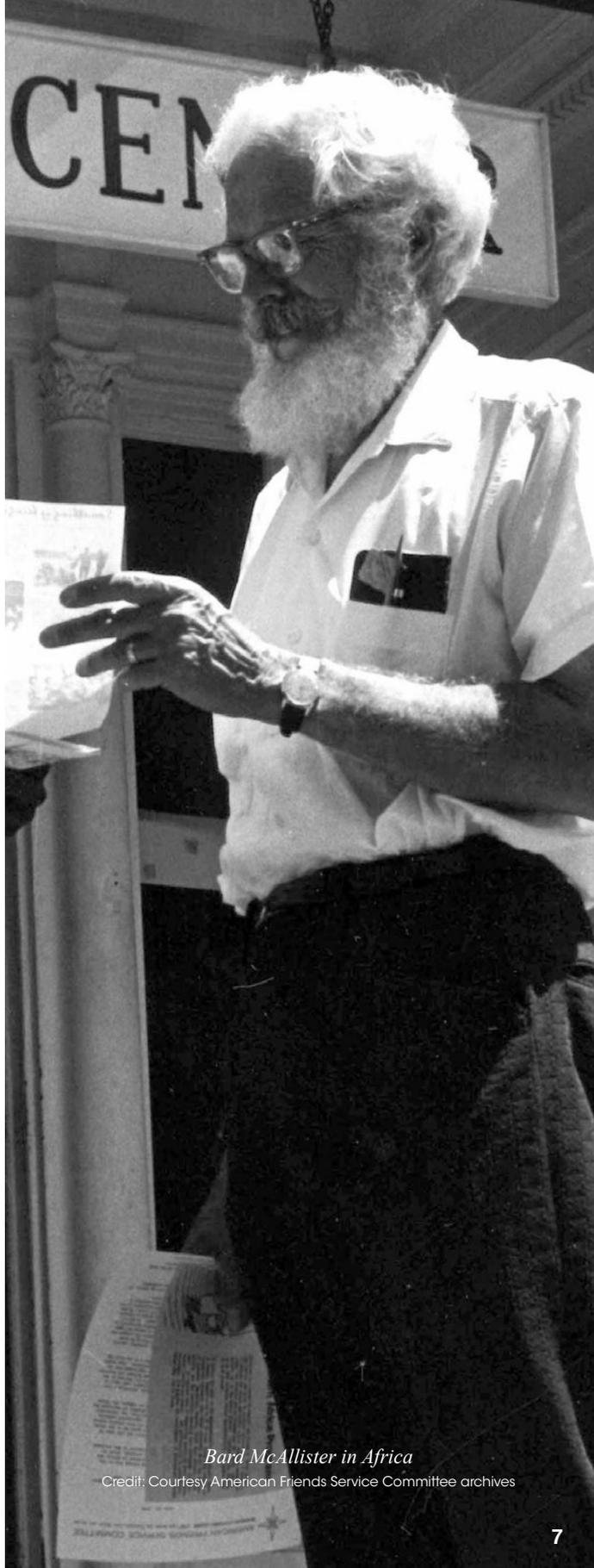
After a failed attempt, intense paper work, long work hours, and negotiations, the first farmworker's co-op in the San Joaquin Valley was created under the name Sequoia Farm Labor Co-Op. The co-op's first labor contract was signed in 1963 with the company Wileman Bros. & Elliott.

“ This was the first contract signed in California between workers and farmers, way before the UFW did the same thing. And it was the same union that made this project fail, Cesar Chavez was the one who accused the [co-op] workers of being scabs and threatened the company with a boycott] Why did he do this? The union did not want competition...It was a tragedy!

Olga McAllister,

97 years old, Bard McAllister's widow
(died January 2017)

However, the co-op had many problems, and its sustainability was only guaranteed by the support of the AFSC Farm Labor Committee. Bard and members of the Farm Labor Committee dedicated many hours contacting farmers interested in working with the co-op. The Farm Labor Committee



Bard McAllister in Africa

Credit: Courtesy American Friends Service Committee archives

obtained a grant from a foundation and that helped, although Bard's plans were ambitious.

In addition, the political and social climate in the Central Valley was changing. The National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), based in Delano, south of Tulare, had been organizing farmworkers since 1962. Created by Dolores Huerta and César Chávez, NFWA would become United Farmworkers (UFW) in 1965 when it would show great strength against the political system, which was controlled by the farmers.

Internally in the Farm Labor Committee, a dialogue took place regarding the effectiveness of the co-op and its role in the well-being of the farmworkers—and if so much effort was justified for such limited results. Eventually the Farm Labor Committee discontinued its support of the farmer's co-op project and instead support the organizing efforts of the UFW.

BUILDING OF HOMES AND SELF-HELP

Bard brought to California important experience in building affordable homes through self-help efforts. In 1937, AFSC had promoted and helped build 50 homes in a mining town in Western Pennsylvania that became the Penn-Craft Community Association. During that same year, a group of fishermen from Nova Scotia used the same self-help system to build their homes. For members of the Farm Labor Committee in Visalia, the prospects of establishing a similar project in the San Joaquin Valley was possible since there was a great similarity between the living conditions of farmworkers and those of the miners and fishermen on the East Coast: low income, very limited access to credit, and a dramatic lack of decent housing in the area.

In 1960, Bard traveled to Washington, D.C. to convince the U.S. Department of Agriculture to promote legislation that would allow farmworkers to become eligible for real estate loans. He helped write the law that was finally approved and incorporated in the Housing Act of 1961. In 1962, the Farm Labor Committee created The Farm Labor Self-Help Housing Project. The poverty-stricken community of Goshen, west of Visalia, was selected for building the first homes.

“ The Self-Help project was not just about building homes, it's rather about building communities. ”

Graciela Martínez,

Director of the Farm Labor Committee,
2001-2010

The construction of these small neighborhoods required many long planning hours, negotiating loans, basic trainings, and a lot of patience. The participants were families who must work, under professional direction, in the construction of their home to lower costs. This collective participation helps create a sense of community and pride amongst the participants. Due to the magnitude of the work and the plans for expansion, in 1965 the Self-Help Housing Project devolved from the AFSC to become an independent organization: Self Help Enterprises (SHE), also based in Visalia. Howard Washburn became the first director. This separation allowed both organizations to focus on their objectives with greater effectiveness, while at the same time implementing the original vision. Members of the Farm Labor Committee and SHE participated in the board of directors or committee of each one, a manifestation of the close relationship and collaboration between them.

“ It was Summer 1966, and it was over 100 degrees in the Valley! Driving down Highway 99 in our way to Visalia, we stopped to have a fresh orange juice in one of those orange-painted fast food stores [Orange Julius] now extinct. We finally arrived at Howard Washburn's house in Visalia in August 1966. He was the director of Self Help Enterprises and he hired me to be his assistant. He told us they were leaving on vacation so we could stay at his house for about three weeks. We started to unload the car, my kids jumped into the pool right away. A little bit later, Howard's mother, who lived a few doors away, came crying and told us he and his family had a bad car accident, killing Howard, his wife and two of his four daughters. That was our introduction to the Valley. ”

Robert "Bob" Marshall,

92 years old, Visalia, August 2016.



Bob Marshall

Credit: Courtesy Self-Help Enterprises

Marshall, a Quaker carpenter who had worked for AFSC in Philadelphia on a housing project, took over SHE. A few months later he was named the director. Marshall and his wife, Joy, carried out very important community work highlighting their support for the Farm Labor Committee.

In less than a decade of work in Tulare County, the Farm Labor Committee implemented projects that made a social impact.

Besides Bard's vision and dedication, there was a small but dedicated group of volunteers that made those projects possible. This group included Bard's wife and their sons. Family participation is common in the work of AFSC. During these years, the pioneers of the Farm Labor Committee managed to establish and develop the project, thanks in large part to AFSC's Quaker vision and the ethics, commitment, and humbleness of the McAllister, Marshall, Lovett families and others.

“ All of those projects and their planning came out of the living room of our home. We also had a lot of trainings and reunions in our home. Our first home was also the Farm Labor Committee's

office, [including use of our telephone for Committee business]. Sometimes folks would arrive and stay for several days at home. I never knew how many folks were joining us for dinner each day!

”

Olga McAllister

In 1966, the McAllister family moved to Zambia, Africa to conduct an AFSC self-help housing project. They returned to Visalia in 1973 where they would continue with their commitment to community work for many years. After a brief period under the direction of Quaker Herb Foster, the Farm Labor Committee hired Ernesto Loredo as their new director. A new phase would begin for the Farm Labor Committee.

THE ACTIVISM YEARS

With a solid base of established projects and the community's recognition during their first years under the leadership of Bard McAllister, the Farm Labor Committee began to reassess their priorities—all the while maintaining their vision. With Ernesto's arrival, the Farm Labor Committee focused primarily on general health projects and dental health for low-income folks; tenant support; and the young farmworker's union, the UFW.

In 1968, when Ernesto was named director, a three-year tenant strike was coming to an end with victory for the tenants. The strike came about due to the rent increases in the camps where day-laborers lived. Ernesto actually lived in one of those camps, in Woodville, west of Porterville, and served as a leader of the tenants who were striking.

The residence camps had been established to remedy the lack of housing in the farming regions of the country and as part of the social changes after the Great Depression. The Farm Security Administration agency was considered responsible for the construction of dozens of these camps, 12 of which were built in California. In Tulare County, the biggest ones were Woodville and Linnell. These camps were administered by the government through the housing authorities. Some farmers and agriculture businesses had barracks—or very precarious housing units—and they offered lodging to their workers, who had to pay rent.

Loredo possessed a very special skill that would help him push for the projects of the Farm Labor Committee. His origin was that of a farmworker and therefore he understood the idiosyncrasies of the day-laborers, their customs, weaknesses, and strengths, in addition to being able to speak their language: Spanish. Little by little, the day laborers of Mexican origin became the majority in the western fields, replacing those of Texan, Filipino, and white origin that had been arriving from Oklahoma and other states because of the Great Depression.

The majority of the farmworkers traveled constantly. Following the crops and living temporarily in camps was their only opportunity to have a roof over their heads. Even today, it is still a common practice for thousands of farmworkers to sleep in the fields or in their vehicles. But rents were increasing constantly in the camps, and the living conditions were not good. The confrontations between tenants and the housing authorities of Tulare County were ongoing.

The Farm Labor Committee played a fundamental role in organizing the tenants to stand up to authorities to put an end to rent increases and improve the conditions of the buildings.

Farm Labor Committee also implemented an agreement with the University of California Santa Cruz to provide students for editing the newspaper “Tenant News,” dedicated precisely to the rights of tenants in the county.

Aligned with its principles for dialogue and consensus, the Farm Labor Committee worked with both tenants and housing authorities but were committed to stand with those whose voices were ignored—in this case, tenants. To assist in the tenant organizing, the Farm Labor Committee invited Jesse Gray—an organizer of the National Organization of Tenant Rights—to visit Tulare County. His work was very important for the creation of the Tenant’s Union in Tulare.

One of the Farm Labor Committee’s most important projects was improving access to public health—including mental health—for low-income individuals in the county. One of its first attempts was in bringing two medical students to help tenants at the camps, all of whom were farmworkers. There were many efforts to create health clinics, but the main problem that the Farm Labor Committee faced was apathy and rejection, even from county authorities, when seeking funding for public health projects. Nevertheless, part of the monies designated for local public health came from—and continues to come from—the state, meaning, it doesn’t imply new taxes or financial sacrifices for the local community.



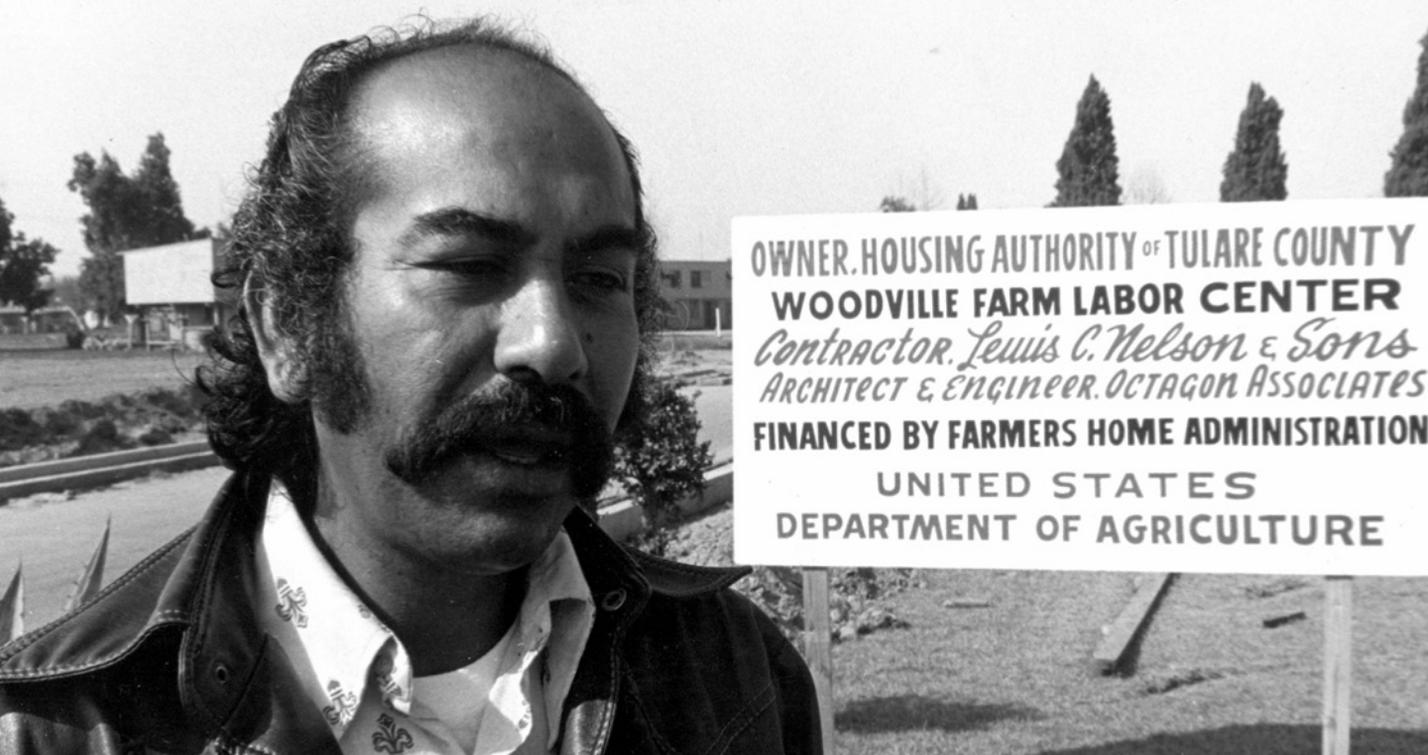
The Farm Labor Committee promoted the creation of health clinics in the county. Nothing like that existed before!



Graciela Martínez,

Former Farm Labor Committee Director,
2001-2011

In spite of these obstacles, the Farm Labor Committee managed to establish clinics and dental care plans in some areas of the county. These efforts helped reached its goal and years later rural health clinics came to be. In short, Farm Labor Committee was on the forefront of making health care accessible in Tulare county. There is no doubt that health and nutrition go hand in hand. Therefore, it



Activist Ernesto Loredo was Farm Labor Committee's director between 1968 and 1987

Credit: Courtesy American Friends Service Committee Archives

wasn't surprising that the Farm Labor Committee advocated and successfully pressured the county to implement a free lunch program for children of low-income families. Although this is common in many school districts today, nothing like it existed in Tulare county at the time.

THE FARMWORKERS' UNION AND THE FARM LABOR COMMITTEE

The work of the AFSC Farm Labor Committee, guided by Quaker principles, sought to create social change so that low-income individuals, such as farmworkers, could attain equality in opportunities, income, and status similar to workers in other industries.

Projects implemented by the Farm Labor Committee—such as the construction of homes through the self-help system, the creation of the farmworker co-op, the push for health clinics, the studies of the social conditions of farmworkers, the study on production patterns and employment in the orange industry, and the trainings for farmworkers to improve their working conditions—were destined to help achieve those goals.

In the mid-'60s, the AFSC Farm Labor Committee established and funded a Strike Fund that helped the families of the farmworkers on strike. AFSC sought for ways to help farmworkers attain political and economic power. In all their efforts, they were in contact with the movement lead by César Chávez.

“ César Chávez's philosophy to achieve social change via non-violence follows Gandhi's philosophy through the combination of respect for an individual, its refusal to accept injustice and exploitation and its honesty. Chávez is possibly much closer philosophically to Gandhi than any other. He is to farmworkers and Mexican-Americans what Martin Luther King, Jr. was for the black people in rural areas and for all those living in poverty in general. He faces the same intense opposition and inspires the same commitment of those two famous men. ”

**From the internal report
"AFSC's Program of Aid to Cesar
Chavez, 1970."**

This support for César Chávez and his early organizing efforts began very early on. According to

Olga McAllister, César Chávez called her husband, Bard, “up to twice a day” in search of advice. Under the direction of Ernesto Loredó, the Farm Labor Committee played an important role in helping the UFW develop its organizing structure.

For example, staff from AFSC supported organizing and administrative tasks for the union. In 1968, César sought support from AFSC in an area for which Quakers are recognized. He wanted to count on someone who shared his commitment with achieving justice for farmworkers through nonviolence.

This person would contribute to his vision, and that of AFSC, in this philosophy of nonviolence in action, during a historical moment in which the union was starting the grape boycott and faced pressures from farmers and their allies that weren't always peaceful.

AFSC's response was quite generous: the organization hired someone and committed to paying their salary for five years. David Burciaga (1923-2011). During World War II, David was a conscientious objector who worked as a medical technician in Europe. Upon returning to the U.S., he dedicated himself to working for better living conditions of those most marginalized as a union representative and organizer of the Community Service Organization (CSO), an organization co-founded by Fred Ross.

David worked for AFSC for more than two decades, and his selection to work as an advisor to César Chávez was a result of his vision and his experience, especially in contract negotiations with the growers. Through the years, this close collaboration between the AFSC Farm Labor Committee and the farmworkers union began to decline until each organization continued on with their work separately, while always maintaining the same respect for each other.

OTHER FARM LABOR COMMITTEE PROJECTS

The Quakers are known for working in service of others without expecting recognition. However, this

modesty adversely affects the documentation of facts and of history behind some important events. Even so, AFSC's Farm Labor Committee's handprints are on many significant historical projects in Tulare County.

Among the significant activities in which the Farm Labor Committee was involved was the lawsuit against the Tulare County Housing Authorities. Upon knowing that this agency had only two employees of Latino origin, none in managerial positions, the Farm Labor Committee filed a lawsuit in collaboration with the California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA), to demand that the housing authorities follow the requirements of affirmative action. Affirmative action refers to a loose and wide set of laws, court rulings and agreements by corporations, government agencies, universities and colleges, to accept race as a consideration when hiring or admitting an individual. These laws and agreements were inspired in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Proposition 209, of California, approved by voters in 1996, dismantled affirmative action almost completely.

The lawsuit led to a victory for the Farm Labor Committee, and the housing agency was forced to restructure itself, opening doors for more job opportunities and promotions for qualified Latinos.

At the same time, the agency gained a greater capacity to understand and resolve situations by which low income folks, particularly farmworkers, were being adversely affected.

For years, the Farm Labor Committee maintained its support for tenant rights, especially for those living in labor camps. The Farm Labor Committee also worked in favor of overtime pay for farmworkers, which finally became law in 2016!

In 1987, Ernesto Loredó retired and AFSC hired Pablo Espinoza, his brother-in-law, who was also from Texas and from a farmworking background. Pablo would lead the Farm Labor Committee for the next 14 years.

“ I changed the name of the program from Farm Labor Committee to Proyecto Campesino, which is actually translated from English. For the folks we worked with, the Mexican farmworkers, the name in English didn't speak to them. ”

Pablo Espinoza,
Proyecto Campesino Director,
1987-2001

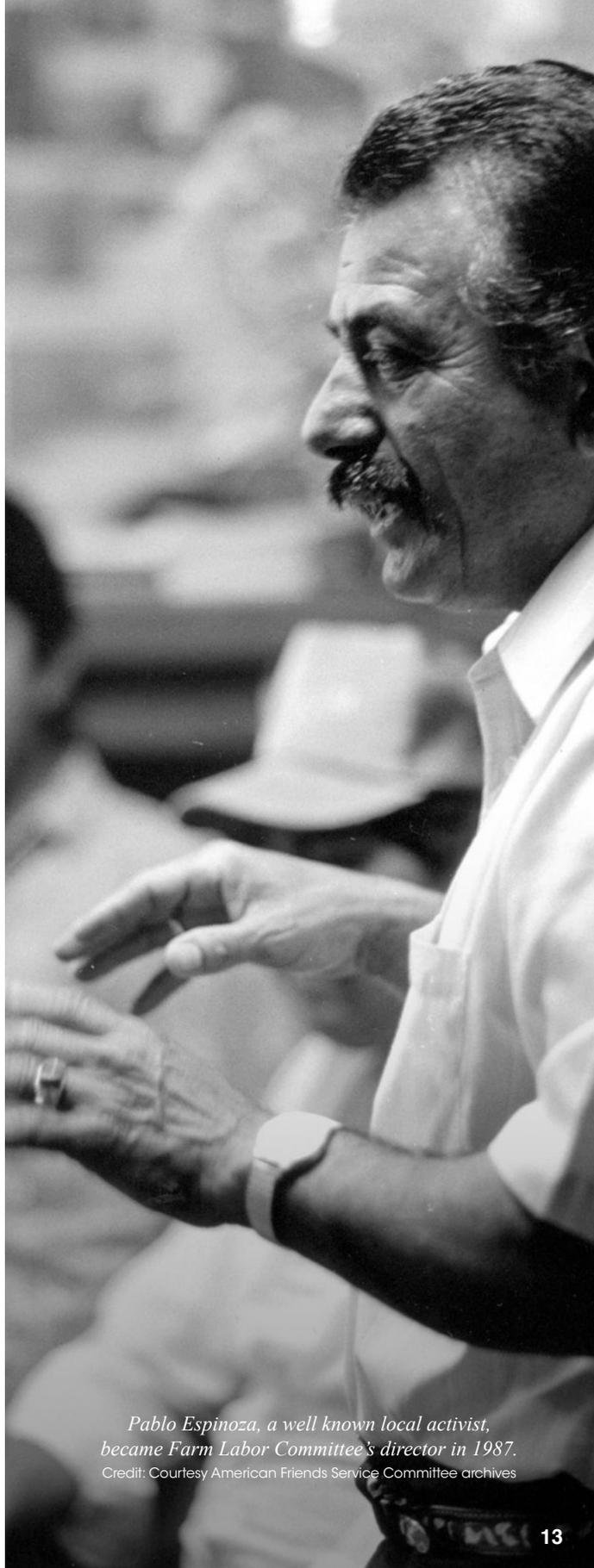
Pablo continued the Farm Labor Committee's orientation and vision, adding a particular leadership style with his personality and previous experience as organizer of the UFW. Pablo was also a known radio host at the time. Through Radio Campesina, owned by the UFW, he carried out a passionate defense of the interests and rights of farmworkers. His message was clear and direct when speaking out against the abuse taking place in the fields, social disparity, and the lack of opportunities for farmworkers.

“ In George Orwell's 'Animal Farm,' written on the side of the barn was the basic rule 'All animals are equal.' Later, as Napoleon, the pig, gained power over the other animals, the rule changed to read 'All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.' The laws governing the 'rights' of farmworkers come straight from Orwell's barn wall. ”

Pablo Espinoza in a letter to the editor to Visalia's local newspaper, 1999.

Pablo's radio program aired on various stations in the San Joaquin Valley. At the end of the 1990s, the Farm Labor Committee created "Radio Grito," a radio show in Spanish produced by AFSC in Visalia. The Farm Labor Committee bought weekly time on a local AM station to air the show. Later, "Radio Grito" evolved into a low-power —limited to 10 miles-coverage area—, independent radio station in Visalia.

One of Pablo's main concerns was the spreading of information to the most marginalized people of the rich San Joaquin Valley, the farmworkers. Ironically, in the last years, the majority of the publications in Spanish in the San Joaquin Valley closed their



*Pablo Espinoza, a well known local activist, became Farm Labor Committee's director in 1987.
Credit: Courtesy American Friends Service Committee archives*

doors due to financial hardship, thus making this community less informed. Pablo was accustomed to visiting the fields, small communities, attending public reunions and organizing reunions to explain their rights to farmworkers and speak out against labor abuses. He would take advantage of these outings to distribute copies of newspapers in Spanish and other informational materials.

FOCUS ON IMMIGRANTS' RIGHTS

In 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), allowed for millions of immigrants to obtain their residency. The Farm Labor Committee made great efforts in Tulare County to help local workers through the residency application process and later on, it developed a program to help new residents pursue U.S. citizenship. This program included English and citizenship classes on top of assistance in preparing paperwork. Participants of the program were motivated to register to vote and take part in their city's social and community-oriented way of life.

As it formed alliances with other organizations from the county of Tulare and the San Joaquin Valley, the Proyecto Campesino was able to work more efficiently in the community. Proyecto Campesino played a key role in the creation of the Central Valley Partnership for Citizenship (CVP), a consortium of organizations based in Central California whose goal was to increase the civic participation of immigrants.

In Tulare County, the Proyecto Campesino co-founded Tulare County Civic Action League (TCCAL), an alliance of organizations committed to social causes, such as citizenship classes, voter registration, political education, etc.

In 2001, Graciela Martinez became the first woman to lead Proyecto Campesino after Pablo Espinoza's retirement. Graciela, also from Texas, joined the UFW during the difficult times of picket lines and the boycott against the grape industry. She had been the Farm Labor Committee's secretary under Bard McAllister. Graciela continued the Proyecto Campesino's community work with passion and dedication. For Graciela, "an injustice towards

one person is an injustice towards all of us." She, just like Loreda and Espinoza, came from a farmworking background, which was crucial for her to connect naturally with the community that Proyecto Campesino served.

By that time, the farmworkers' living situation continued to be one of poverty and marginalization, with only a few small signs of improvement. Farmworkers' mobility, the language barrier, and their undocumented status contributed to this situation and to the lack of social participation.

While Tulare County became the richest in agriculture production in the state (*According to the California Department of Food and Agriculture, Tulare County sales of crops, livestock and other agricultural commodities totalized \$8.08 billion in 2014*), it continued to have one of the highest levels of poverty. The local authorities did little or nothing at all to care for the well-being of this community. During this period, Proyecto Campesino extended its citizenship classes to small communities in the county, in this manner reaching a community of "forgotten" workers, almost invisible to the rest of society. Proyecto Campesino moved for the second time in history to Farmersville, a small farming town east of Visalia with 10,000 residents, 85 percent of which were Latino.

Proyecto Campesino received visits or calls daily from workers looking for social services, orientation, and even advice. During the citrus freeze of 1998-1999 and others that followed, Proyecto Campesino organized campaigns to have the federal government declare the county a disaster zone, releasing recovery funds for the workers in the fields and in the canning factories.

In 2006, the so-called Immigrant's Movement burst into America's political scene like never before in modern times. Hundred of thousands of immigrants and allies marched on the streets of many US cities expressing loudly their concerns, interests, demands and contributions to their new society.

Proyecto Campesino was an important part of this movement in Tulare County taking part on marches and promoting open dialogues about immigration.



Graciela Martinez was the first female director of Farm Labor Committee

Credit: Eduardo Stanley

Proyecto also mobilized in support of allowing undocumented immigrants to apply for drivers' licenses, which it became a reality in 2014 when AB 60 was signed into law.

In 2011, Miguel Báez became the new director of Proyecto Campesino after Graciela retired. Miguel continued with the organization's commitment to the most marginalized local communities, implementing AFSC's vision.

Miguel, a Mexican immigrant, studied journalism and lived most of his life in Porterville, Tulare County. His professional work allowed him to know the area and its people quite well. "To start, we decided to ask folks which services they needed most or how we could help—many requested citizenship classes." Besides these classes, due to the lack of useful information

particularly in Spanish, Miguel wanted to create a newspaper or newsletter to inform the local workers of news that might affect them. "We had the idea of forming a group of young volunteers for this Project," he commented. "The citizenship classes included what we call citizenship participation. We want conscious committed people. There are so many needs in the county of Tulare!"



Miguel Baez was the last director of Proyecto Campesino (2011 - 2013)

Credit: Eduardo Stanley

Two years later, Miguel fell ill and was unable to continue leading Proyecto Campesino. The Farm Labor Committee/ Proyecto Campesino began to fade and finally, in 2015, it closed its doors, leaving behind a long history of important accomplishments and a lesson in humility, dedication, and commitment to the community it served for 60 years.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the American Friends Service Committee for giving me the opportunity of documenting the 60 years history of its Farm Labor Committee in Tulare County, California. Segments of that documentation is published in this “Brief History of Proyecto Campesino.”

For me, it was a very interesting and emotional trip back in history learning about the commitment, dedication and search for social justice by a group of pioneers in the field.

I would like to express my gratitude to those who provided support and shared with me about their work experiences with Proyecto Campesino. Also, my gratitude to Stephen McNeil, Peace Program Director of the AFSC San Francisco office, for his input and generous sharing of photos and documents about the origins of American Friends Service Committee in California and Proyecto Campesino. My gratitude to Donald Davis for opening the AFSC/Proyecto Campesino archives in Philadelphia for me during my research period of time, and to Mark Miller, former Central Valley Regional Director of AFSC for providing me with very valuable information.

I would like to thank Theresa Kirby and Ronna Bolante, from the Communications Department at the AFSC office in Philadelphia for their editing work to the original text, and to Dayanna Sevilla for her translation from my original text in Spanish.

Last and not least: I would like to thank the personnel of Pan Valley Institute, American Friends’ program in Fresno, California, for their constant support to this project.

DIRECTORS OF PROYECTO CAMPESINO

Bard Mcallister (1955 - 1966)

Herb Foster (1966 - 1968)

Ernesto Loredó (1968 - 1987)

Pablo Espinoza (1987 - 2001)

Graciela Martínez (2001 - 2010)

Martin Cuevas (2010)

Miguel Baez (2011 - 2013)

These directors received the long-lasting support of profoundly dedicated people who over the years worked hard in different capacities to make Proyecto Campesino’s vision a reality: Beth and Bill Lovett, Joy and Bob Marshall, Olga McAllister, Rena Bebout, Roberto de la Rosa, Diana Ricci, Eddie Cuellar, Everett Krakov, Gunnar Jensen, and many more.

Published by:



**American Friends
Service Committee**

On the front cover:

A family of farmworkers in Tulare County circa 1980

Credit: Courtesy American Friends Service Committee archives