THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

February 8, 1968

Dear Dr. Garcia:

I thought you would be interested in the enclosed speech which Commissioner Ximenes delivered last month before the Secretary of Agriculture's Advisory Committee on Civil Rights. The positive response in Mr. Birkhead's accompanying letter is, I believe, indicative of the Federal government's reaction to the constructive tone of the recommendations made in El Paso.

Sincerely,

David S. North Executive Director Inter-Agency Committee on Mexican American Affairs

Dr, Hector Garcia 1315 Bright Avenue Corpus Christi, Texas 78405



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY WASHINGTON

January 7 1 1968

Honorable Vicente T. Ximenes Chairman Inter-Agency Committee on Mexican-American Affairs The White House Washington, D. C. 20500

Dear Mr. Commissioner:

The Secretary's Advisory Committee on Civil Rights and I are very grateful to you for the time you took on December 14, 1967, to share your thoughts and concerns about agriculture and the Mexican-American with us.

I might say, though perhaps I should not make this kind of judgment, that your paper was particularly well done; without question, one of the two or three best presentations the Committee has heard in its three years of hearing very competent administrators and speakers. I intend to circulate the paper not only to the Committee members but also to the agency administrators here in the Department.

Thank you, Mr. Commissioner, for responding so quickly and so competently to our request for your assistance.

Sincerely yours,

Kenneth M. Birkhead Chairman

Mr. Chairman and members of the Secretary's Advisory Committee on Civil Rights, Mr. Louis Tellez and I are very pleased to be meeting with you today. I understand that for almost three years you have served as advisors to Secretary Freeman and that during that time you have developed extensive expertise in matters of people-oriented agricultural programs and policy. I very much welcome, therefore, your attention to the problems that beset the rural Mexican American community of our country and to the proposals and suggestions which were The presented by several Mexican American citizens during the recent Cabinet Committee Hearings in El Paso, Texas.

A general overview of the hearings provides us with some very basic guidelines by which the Federal Government must measure any steps taken to improve conditions for the Mexican American citizen.

Foremost in importance is the long acknowledged but long ignored reality that cultural differences do exist between the Mexican American and the non-Mexican American. The corollary, that these cultural differences affect the attitudes of the Mexican American and form for him a different pattern of social symbols, follows logically. While our programs have been geared, in great measure, toward the Anglo American population, the Mexican American has been falling behind with all the implications that non-growth can have in a progressive industrial society such as ours. When programs are designed to take into account and capitalize upon these differences, we can expect the Mexican American to move forward to his rightful place in the economic and social being of our country. Linked to culture is language. The witnesses supported the widespread institution of bilingual education for Spanish-surnamed students in the elementary grades where the student's future academic and social success is very greatly determined. But, the concept of bilingualism does not stop at the edges of the public school. At this moment in our country, we have a great many adults -- fathers and mothers. -- who are in need of bilingual assistance in every phase of adult education, job training and rural and agricultural development programs.

Information about available Federal assistance and programs is not reaching the Mexican American or, if it does, it comes to him in a precenseal and often inaccurate fashion. The witnesses presented varied suggestions to make such information available and the proposals include the development of an "outreach" philosophy on the part of Federal employees in regional and local offices; the stepped-up effort to bring the fruits of research, such as in agriculture, to the Mexican American; and, perhaps most important, the active recruitment and the placement in Federal Government service of Mexican Americans who can help in bringing the relevant and necessary information and services to the Mexican American population.

Involvement of the Mexican American on other levels is also necessary. Testimony indicates that the low-income Mexican American family must be brought into the planning stages of all programs which will affect them. The opportunity to express their opinions can bring to Mexican

- 2 -

Americans a new understanding and, in turn, can make the programs more effective in meeting the needs of this people.

There is no question that a real need exists for more coordination among concerned agencies. There are now several experimental centers in which program information is gathered and coordinated to the benefit of the recipients and the agencies. Further correlation and cooperation must be developed between government offices, private industry and Mexican American civic organizations.

With these basic guidelines in mind, I turn now to the specific proposals made in the area of agriculture.

The hearings emphasized the fact that the importance of rural development to the Mexican American cannot be overestimated. Although the great majority of the Mexican American community has migrated to cities, there remain thousands in rural and semi-rural areas as subsistence farmers and thousands of others in the fields as migrants or hired farm hands. One witness, Dr. Ernesto Galarza, stated that community development is urgently necessary to halt such migration from rural towns and shoestring settlements. The effort to draw or hold the Mexican American in the rural setting must be made in good faith, with capital, and with education of the young. The base or root, however, must be economic, productive and not a handout.

Some of the problems of the farm laborer can be resolved only through

- 3 -

legislative measures or through inter-departmental effort. Repeatedly, the witnesses in El Paso identified some of these solutions as being National Labor Relations Act coverage, encouragement of collective bargaining, the extension of the Fair Labor Standards Act to more farm laborers, and protection against the flow of alien commuter labor.

While NLRA coverage is a legislative matter, many of the speakers at the hearings suggested that the Department of Agriculture take an active and forceful role in pursuing such coverage and also encourage, in every way possible through administrative means, the formation of farm unions. Up until the present, it was noted, we have taken little interest in the labor factor of agriculture while we have been aiding the farmer with managerial assistance and technological research among other types of assistance.

Concomitant with the above, the witnesses asked that the Department consider the present situation in which the alien enters the United States to take work in a struck plant or farm. As you know, the Secretary of Labor has moved against this practice through a newly issued Immigration and Naturalization Service regulation restricting the use of the green entry card by aliens for the purpose of entering the U. S. to accept employment as strikebreakers. As you can understand, there are many ways in which the alien laborer and the farm employer can manipulate this regulation and we are aware of instances in which they have. While this is basically a problem which must be solved by the Department of Labor

- 4 -

and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, it has been suggested that one way in which the Department of Agriculture can directly help is by withholding all direct and indirect subsidies, contracts and services from the farm employer who employs illegals, braceros or commuters during a strike. As we all know, economics is a powerful concept.

It was also suggested that, where the Fair Labor Standards Act or the concept of prevailing wage apply, the Department of Agriculture should require that, as a condition to obtaining federal subsidies of any kind, the agricultural operator comply with such standards of pay for farm laborers.

Finally, several witnesses expressed their general concern regarding the "green card commuter" to whom I have referred. The commuter is willing to take less for his work than the domestic who must receive enough to pay for decent living conditions in the relatively high cost of the United States side and does, therefore, displace the domestic worker and lowers the wage and working conditions of the area. There is a tendency, which I have discussed, for commuters to be encouraged to take jobs at struck plants or farms thus further hindering union organization. Fully one third of the commuters work on farms. We should consider the possibility of extending the prevailing wage concept and work standards to the commuter, thereby removing the wage depressant for domestic laborers and perhaps raising, eventually, the living standard on the other side of the border.

The hearings triggered an immediate study of the commuters. Their cards are being stamped and it will be possible to identify and count them. The hearings also brought forth some proposals. Some suggested that the commuter system was illegal and that the U.S. residence requirements should be enforced. Others suggested that perhaps the most significant move which the Department of Agriculture can make -- and can make right away -- is to improve the wages and working conditions of sugar beet workers.

There is no doubt of the Department's authority; Congress, under the Sugar Act, gave the Secretary the power to set wages of sugar beet workers, and the Secretary has been setting these wages annually for many years.

As was pointed out in El Paso, however, sugar <u>beet</u> workers (who are generally Mexican Americans, and always American residents) do not have the same wage and working conditions protection that most of the sugar <u>cane</u> workers have enjoyed for years. The sugar cane workers receive a guaranteed minimum wage -- sugar beet workers do not. The foreign sugar cane cutters of Florida are protected by workmen's compensation, because the government in Kingston (Jamaica) insists on it -- unfortunately, to date, the government in Washington has not made similar requirements for our own sugar beet workers.

It is awfully difficult to explain why our workers are treated considerably less favorably than foreign workers, and I hope that the Secretary, at the end of the current round of sugar beet hearings, now in progress, will make it so that we do not have to try to explain that situation.

Turning from the particular problems of the migrant and hired farm workers to the subsistence farmer and village dweller, we find a widespread need

- 6 -

for assistance in improving the use of resources which he already has, for improving the programs that might be able to help him and for finding and developing other sources of income wherever possible.

Our American free enterprise economy is based on the skillful manipulation and understanding of the market -- meeting domand with supply produced and marketed in the most efficient and inexpensive way possible. Traditionally, the Mexican American has worked his small plot and has taken his small output to the closest buyer. It is not that the Mexican American farmer or producer will not accept the coop principle -- he simply does not have the knowledge that is necessary to make it work. With the assistance of the Department of Agriculture, the development of cooperatives among sub-marginal Mexican American producers could make the difference; could bring the benefits of efficient production and competitive marketing to a stagnant sector of our advancing farm economy.

Toward this end, it was proposed that the Department of Agriculture should coordinate on a state and Federal level the efforts of various agencies who are working in the field of cooperative development. Unity of purpose and coordination of activity would result in a minimum of overlap and the maximum in results.

There must be funds for the needed education, research and assistance, and loans for such development have been made through the Economic Development Administration and through the Farmers Home Administration. The El Paso discussion, in this respect, noted the need for simplification of the procedure for securing such a loan, the shortening of loan

- 7 -

approval periods, and the employment of additional staff to followup loan approvals with an education process in the effective handling of loan monies. The encouragement and assistance which the Department of Agriculture can render could, conceivably within a short time, create a more sophisticated and market-wise farmer and certainly a much more efficient and profitable type of production.

A connected issue is the effect of public lands policy on the small farmer. In El Paso, we heard testimony to the effect that the present condition of federal lands, on which many small farmers depend for grazing to supplement their meagre holdings, cannot support an increased livestock population. It is acknowledged that both federal and private land holdings are in need of a re-seeding, re-vegetation and erosion control program, but at the same time the Department of Agriculture has continued to budget a disproportionate share of its monies to the development. Secretary Freeman said, at the hearings, that a hard look will be taken by the Department at the need of funds for increased revegation and range improvement and we welcome this.

In further regard to the land question, it was suggested that a government committee composed of people familiar with the language and customs of the Spanish-surnamed people be set up to study the land grant questions and recommend ways of settling it. One proposal was that farmer cooperatives should be formed through programs similar to ones promoted in other countries by, the U. S. Government based on land distribution from

- 8 -

existing public domain land. This land could be contracted, sold, leased, or made available through other feasible means.

Generally speaking, the two agencies of the Department of Agriculture which come closest to and most directly influence the rural Mexican American are the Extension Service and the Forest Service.

The Forest Service must be prepared to engage in an extensive program of personnel retraining and the recruitment of the Spanish American for professional positions. Testimony delivered in El Paso indicates that for too long the Forest Service has remained untouched and insensitive to the cultural differences and material needs of the Mexican Americans who depend for their economic existence upon the resources of our national forest lands. Changes have been called for, changes that envision not only the development of the forest lands for grazing, but the establishment of better lines of communication between the Forest Service and the Mexican American. The Mexican American expects the Forest Service to tell him the intent of its land policy and he expects the Forest Service to include him in the basic planning for the economic development of his area, because his very economic existence depends upon the moves which Forest Service makes.

In regard to the Extension Service, suggestions included a study to determine the equality of existing programs from State to State and county to county and to determine what categories of people are being served by these programs. Also, the method of financing --one third

- 9 -

of the cost to be borne by each of the Federal, State and county government -- warrants study in that many times the poorest counties which need the help most are the ones which cannot afford to have an Extension agent . In short, the Service is in need of re-orientation to deal with the problems of the poor.

Repeatedly, the point has been made that the lack of outreach by FHA loan officers, the unreasonable delay in the processing of loan applications and the scarcity of follow-up technical assistance spell little hope for the Mexican American in Farmer's Home Administration loan programs as they are now administered. El Paso testimony urged the employment of Mexican Americans who can comprehend the unique needs of the group and it should be emphasized that these Mexican American loan officers should be in addition to the present staffing levels because only additional FHA staff can supply the needed elements of outreach, speed and technical assistance. Consideration should be given to the small loan and simple application procedures. This is what the Mexican American needs.

Finally, we come to the Food Distribution Programs as they affect all Mexican Americans and the changes which were suggested in El Paso. First, it was proposed that all food assistance programs should place a greater emphasis on nutritional standards which should be reflected in a greater distribution of protein foods and a resultant increase in the authority to purchase protein foods. Second, the Department should implement a strong line of communication to the citizens in order

- 10 -

to create an awareness of food assistance programs. Mr. Louis Telled has recently been instrumental in Departmental efforts to do just this. Third, the Food Stamp Program is preferred over the Commodity Distribution because it respects the pride of those who are served and gives a greater opportunity for a balanced diet. However, it was suggested that both programs be allowed in the same region informuch as there are many who cannot afford to enter into the Food Stamp Program and desperately need the food. Fourth, in the case of migrant workers, who are paid on a day-to-day basis, the necessity of buying food stamps on a monthly, or even semimonthly basis is not compatible with the spending patterns of the family and greater flexibility should be permitted.

You will have noticed the persistent thread in the testimony presented in El Paso that it is important that the Department of Agriculture hire more Mexican Americans in order to improve the chances of success of its programs which affect Mexican Americans. The emphasis here is on the understanding which the common cultural background the Spanish American individual brings to his position. There are those in the Department who contend that Mexican Americans with the appropriate qualifications cannot be found, and I say to them that they can be found if the Department will only look in the right places. Recruit in the small Southwestern colleges, make contact with the many Mexican American organizations and by all means utilize the services of the Inter-Agency Committee. It is imperative that the current level of employment of Mexican Americans in Departmental programs be added to and improved. One Mexican American out of 29 full time Farmer's home Administration employees in Arizona in 1967 is not enough. One Spanish-curnamed individual in the whole

- 11 -

Southwest appointed to a State Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service Committee is not enough. Neither is the total assence of any Mexican American professional on the Excension Service Statelevel staff in Texas (nough. It is important that the Department move on this and move now.

In summary, the basic problems of the rural Mexican American is a lack of communication, a lack of knowledge and a lack of organization with which to brong his needs to the attention of policy-makers and the lack of political muscle with which to back the demands he might make.

We have accepted as a fact of life -- and even praised -- the existence of lobbies and interest groups. The commercial farmers in American have some very powerful organizations which present their needs and push for the enactment of their proposals. They have achieved large government suboidies for many things including research. These benefits seldem have meaning for or accrue to the subsistence farmer. We must accept the principle that the government, in such instance, must exercise leadership to identify the needs of a group which cannot do it alone and to see that concrete action is taken to bring to them the help they need. The Secretary of Agriculture has declared that it is his goal to make rural areas a better place in which to live. Taking the steps suggested in El Paso would go far toward making that goal a reality for the Mexican American.

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