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Publication Date

2010-09-21

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A Report on the Project's Activities and Results, 2008-2009
Juan Vicente Palerm, Principal Investigator
(September 12, 2010)

Introduction

The *Agriculture, Farm Labor, and Rural Communities in California in the 21st Century* proposal submitted to the UC Labor and Employment Research Fund was approved and funded with \$38,767 to undertake the proposed activities between January 1 and December 31, 2008. A no-cost extension of the grant to September 30, 2009 was approved by the funding agency. During the award period P.I. Juan Vicente Palerm assisted by professor Travis DuBry, two anthropology graduate assistants (Maritza Maksimow and Rani McLean) and one geography graduate assistant (Indy Hurt) completed the tasks outlined in the proposal. Following, we offer a brief academic report on the activities that were undertaken and the results that were obtained.

Project Aims

We proposed to integrate into one searchable data-base four sets of available data on California farming, agricultural employment & farm labor markets, rural population, and community ethnographies from 1970 to present. The integrated data, we argued, would provide an improved understanding of a restructured agricultural economy, its influence over farm jobs, and the transformation of rural society through the rise and rapid growth of farm labor communities populated by immigrants from Mexico. Ultimately, the integrated information into a searchable date-base could become a valuable research tool for other researchers and rural development practitioners. It is our intention to make this research tool available to the public by offering it via the Internet.

Project Actions

We have assembled and organized four distinct data sets involving agriculture, farm employment, rural population, and community ethnographies. These include: (a) 1970-2009 Agricultural Commissioner's County Crop Reports for 18 California counties; (b) 1970-2009 California Employment Development Department's Agricultural Employment Reports; (c) 1970-2000 Bureau of Census Population Reports on 225 farm labor communities located principally in the 18 selected California counties; and (d) 1984-2009 ethnographic reports (publications, papers, theses, dissertations, and reports) generated by *The Transformation of California Agriculture and Rise of Farm Labor Communities* project undertaken by P.I. Juan Vicente Palerm.

County Crop Reports, 1970-2009

The project focused attention on 18 California counties whose combined agricultural production accounts for well over 90% of the state's annual agricultural value: Fresno, Imperial, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Monterey, Napa, Riverside, San Diego, San Joaquin, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, Sonoma, Stanislaus, Ventura, and Tulare. The county agricultural commissioners' annual reports are extremely accurate regarding crops, land use and values. A longitudinal examination of these county reports, among other things, can reveal changes regarding farm production and employment, including the number of required laborers vis-à-vis crops, and their distribution in time and space. Although the county reports have a uniform format, mandated by the California Department of Food and Agriculture, accessibility to the information varies greatly. Some counties, for example, offer the reports online, sometimes dating back to the 1920s, while others only offer available printed materials. To date, we have collected 1970-2008 reports, sometimes physically scouring them from county offices, for the 18 counties and longitudinal data on crops and crop values have been integrated into a database.

A quick review of the reports confirm that, without exception, the 18 agricultural counties have sustained healthy economic growth over the past 3 decades based on an unrelenting shift from low value field crops to high value specialty crops which, in turn, has greatly increased farm employment. In Central Valley counties, cotton, potatoes, wheat and rice have yielded to table grapes, almonds, stone fruit and pistachio; Coastal counties have increased acreage devoted to strawberries, wine grapes, premium vegetables, and flowers at the expense of dairy, cattle, pasture and alfalfa; and Desert counties have expanded production of spring-to-early-summer fruits and vegetables, citrus, and are experimenting with exotic fruits such as mango.

Agricultural Employment Reports, 1985-2009

Until the mid-1980s, the California Employment Development Department (EDD) had been unable to offer accurate and reliable information regarding employment in the state's agricultural sector. This was due, among other reasons, to poor reporting practices on the part of agricultural employers and to the large, overwhelming presence of foreign undocumented workers in the agricultural workforce. Starting in the 1980s, however, new reporting requirements greatly improved the quality of available information. Although still imperfect, collected farm employment data can be disaggregated by locality, crop, employer and month of the year, allowing us to appreciate the concentration of workers in space and time, and longitudinally to assess changes in the size and makeup of the workforce – state and countywide. Initially EDD published well-organized quarterly and annual reports (Agricultural Employment Reports 882A, 1985-1992) but subsequently only the raw data are posted in a massive database available online. To date, we have collected and processed the 1985-1992 reports but are still engaged in the sorting of 1993-2009 raw data to make it compatible with the published reports, particularly regarding county and crop categories.

Agricultural employment data confirm that crop production changes documented in the county crop reports (i.e. agricultural restructuring) have indeed augmented farm employment and considerably modified employment practices from, for example, short peak seasons to longer and more stable jobs. This can now be appreciated and measured with some degree of accuracy at the county level.

Population Reports, 1970-2000

The U.S. Census Bureau's decennial census reports provide fine-grained information regarding the population of localities and/or census tracts. We have assembled Census Bureau information over four decades for locations that are found within the agricultural spaces of the 18 selected counties and generated basic demographic profiles regarding their population. We are, moreover, poised to incorporate 2010 information as soon as it is released.

Data from the 2000 and 1990 censuses are available online as searchable and customized downloads at the Census Bureau's website, while the 1980 and 1970 censuses are only available as single entire downloads for the state of California. This means that 2000 and 1990 data are manageable and can be easily transferred to a spreadsheet or database, while the 1980 and 1970 data require intensive manual input. We have thus far manually processed 1980 census data and will be tackling the 1970 reports at a later date.

Census data are not always directly available for all rural towns and small cities. Many small-unincorporated towns, for example, are lumped together into a single county group or a Census Designated Place (CDP). This complicates the tracking of their specific development. Nonetheless, we have identified 225 distinct locations that presently constitute to foci of our analyses. At a later date we will strive to include omitted unincorporated locations in order to have a complete representation.

Census data assembled for the 225 locations include, among others, size of population, number and percentage of the Hispanic/Latino population, sex and age, number and size of families, number of housing units, employment, and per capita, family and household income, and education. These allow to construct basic community profiles and to assess change over time.

Collected census information clearly confirms a major demographic transformation of California's rural/agricultural communities located within its major agricultural regions, where many former migrant workers have settled permanently with their families. Without exception, the population in the 225 rural sites has grown exponentially and become Hispanic dominant, at times tripling in size as the combined result of high immigration and fertility. The population growth is accompanied by many other changes (social, economic, cultural, and political) that the census data can only detect in a very broad manner.

Truthing and On-Site Verification, 2008-2009

The statistical data we are using are not always reliable or current. This is especially true with California EDD and U.S. Census Bureau reports involving the Latino population and rural, out-of-the-way places. Spanish speaking Latinos, for example, are notoriously evasive and resistant to questionnaires and surveys whose purpose is to identify and enumerate them. We have therefore conducted on-site visits to many of the 225 rural sites and other unincorporated places to directly observe urban and agricultural landscapes, residential and work spaces. The information recorded in the field provides an improved context that complements the available statistical analyses. To this end, we collected on-site information on agricultural enterprises and their production infrastructure, the general state of farm labor communities (i.e., housing and basic public services), community organizations (i.e., schools and churches), and local non-farm economic activity (i.e., services and retail businesses). This information is supplemented with photography and other printed documentation. Eventually, the information collected at the sites will be selected and posted in the integrated database.

Ethnographic Reports, 1985-2009

The nearly 25-year-old *Transformation of California Agriculture and Rise of Farm Labor Communities* project has generated a plethora of publications (i.e., books and articles), unpublished papers and reports, and masters theses and doctoral dissertations that were until recently dispersed. In addition, project participants have contributed a bounty of photographic images covering most every aspect of farming, farm work and community life in the studied locations. Nearly all these materials have been collected in various forms (digital and hard copy) and will be digitized so that they can be placed in the integrated database. It will therefore be possible to locate and download ethnographic texts, and view images from the field according to location, time, activity, and author. This work will be undertaken during 2010-2011.

Results

In sum, we have completed the following tasks. 1970 to 2009 County crop reports for 18 agricultural counties have been collected and processed into a searchable database. 1985-2009 EDD agricultural employment reports have been gathered but are not fully integrated into a searchable database because manual input of printed reports (1985-1992) and manual handling of online EDD raw data has been slower or more complicated than anticipated. 1980-2000 U.S. Census Bureau population reports for 225 rural towns and communities is complete and integrated into a searchable database, but 1970 census reports are pending because they require adjustments to ensure compatibility with more recent reports. Visits to nearly one-half of the 225 sites have been completed and collected data (reports, photography, and documents) is available for posting. And 1985-

2009 research products have been assembled and will be prepared as PDF files for posting.

We initially aspired to integrate all the above mentioned data sets (statistical and ethnographic) into a single GIS format to enhance analytical capabilities and, primarily, to enable the sharing of the captured and integrated information with other researchers, community development practitioners, and the general public at large. After consulting with the Center for Spatial Studies at UCSB, we opted to employ ArcGIS software and recruited its expert assistance to develop the ArcGIS framework for our data sets and to train our researchers in the use of the sophisticated software. The adoption and application of the GIS software, however, proved to be beyond the capability of our personnel. Hence, we were forced to abandon the initial purpose of using GIS and retreat to a more manageable system that will still allow us to meet the original goals of the project. We are therefore currently developing a website that will contain all our data and make it available via a simpler, more conventional and user-friendly system. We expect the website to be up and running with most of the collected information during the course of 2010-2011.