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Bracero program supplies labor during World War II

 83 years ago on August 4th, 1942

On this day in 1942, the United States government signed the Mexican Farm Labor Program Agreement with Mexico. Managed by several government agencies, including the Department of Agriculture, as a temporary, war-related measure to supply much-needed workers during the early years of World War II, the bracero (Spanish for "arm-man," or manual laborer) program continued uninterrupted until 1964. The agreement guaranteed a minimum wage of thirty cents an hour and humane treatment of Mexican farmworkers in the United States. During the first five years of the program, Texas farmers chose not to participate in the restrictive accord, opting to hire farmworkers directly from Mexico who entered the United State illegally. The abundant supply of labor brought into the United States legally finally enticed Texans to participate fully in the program. More than 4.5 million entered the United States during the twenty-two years of the program. Most never returned. Mexican agricultural workers, considered an unlimited supply of cheap labor, have been pawns to a host

of economic, political, social, and humanitarian interests. Journalists such as Pauline Kibbe documented how poor wages, lack of educational opportunities for the children, malnutrition, poor sanitation, and discrimination have contributed to continued tension between Texas growers and migrant laborers and the federal government. Migrant workers have nonetheless continued to walk to the United States, legally or illegally.

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