When considered as unemployed transients, migratory casual-workers, tramps, and temporarily mobile job seekers, all have some common characteristics. From the point of view of professional social service workers, some of their problems unquestionably have a common basis for treatment. But equally important in approaching the problems of the migrant population, are the basic differences of the several migratory groups. And what I want to do this morning is to attempt to distinguish the character, the motivation, and the opportunity of the migratory farm labor groups.

The broad patterns of the movement of agricultural workers about the country are fairly well defined. We have been aware, for years, of the movement of fruit, truck and berry workers up the Atlantic seaboard. Beginning with the strawberry and truck harvests in Florida, in the early months of the year, a thin stream of workers trickles up the coastal plains to work in the successively ripening crops of the Carolinas, Virginia, Delaware and New Jersey.

To avoid repetition, it can be noted here, that neither in this nor in any of the other broad migratory patterns mentioned hereafter, is there a compact and cohesive group moving from place to place. In each active area new recruits join the movement, and old ones drop out. Many workers mingle with the migratory stream only at one point, and then return to a home base. The influx of migrants into an area, also, usually represents an addition to a backlog of resident labor that is continuously available, but which is only used seasonally in agriculture.

With respect to that part of the migrant flow which actually begins a season at one end of the migration pattern, and closes the season at the other, it should be noted that the same faces are not seen year after year. Even though a worker and his family follow a consistent route for several years, alternative routes are eventually developed, and efforts to settle down are made recurrently. In the sample studies
of migratory families that have come to our attention, a consistent migratory pattern has not been reported as a notable characteristic of the individual families, but a desire for stability has been expressed with pitiable frequency.

With this word of caution as to the meaning of the expression, let us return to other "broad migratory patterns." Florida is also a point of origin of the so-called berry migration that is followed from Florida and Louisiana, through the strawberry and tomato fields of Arkansas and Missouri, and on up into the Michigan peninsula.

The migration through the wheat fields of the Great Plains states from Texas to the Canadian border was the subject of much study and comment during the preceding decade. Characterized by the so-called "bindle-stiff," in distinction to the family group that prevails in most other agricultural migrations, this movement has suffered a decline as a result of the extended use of the combine, and of depressed grain prices. The combine has greatly reduced the need for casually employed labor, and low prices have stimulated the use of exchange and unpaid family labor.

Somewhat different from other migrations is the movement of persons of Mexican descent, from Texas and New Mexico into the sugar beet fields of states to the north. The distinction here is based on the fact that the employment contract, and to a lesser extent the nature of the work, limits the movement of these Spanish speaking groups to single destinations, rather than to a succession of harvesting areas.

As we move through the Southwest, from Texas to the Pacific Coast, commercialized farming, with its complete dependence on hired labor, becomes the dominant type of agriculture. Texas and the Pacific states, partly because of the commercialized nature of their agriculture, and partly because of their physical size, support migrations of major magnitude within their own borders. In Washington and Oregon, berries, hops, apples and to a lesser extent wheat, provide the basis for an intrastate migration. In Texas, truck crops in the Lower Rio Grande and the Winter Garden area, early cotton in the Corpus Christi district, and the later cotton crop in the Black Prairie and the West Texas plains, make for migration opportunities. California harvests begin with winter peas and lettuce in the Imperial Valley, and blossom out into the myriad crops of the Coast and of the fertile central valleys. Intra-state migrations are not typical of New Mexico and Arizona, but local supplies of labor are abundantly augmented each season by migrants from Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, Texas and California.

The migrations in the Pacific Coast states and Texas are by no means confined to residents of the several states. Texas draws crop followers from New Mexico and the states to the east and north. There is also an important annual interchange of labor between California and Arizona, and between California, Oregon and Washington. Moreover, in
recent years the preponderantly one way migration of families from the Great Plains states, removed from their farms by drought, dust, depression, and increasing mechanization of farms, has mingled with the movement of seasonal agricultural workers. Already existing underemployment has been magnified, and a new train of problems has followed in the wake of their arrival on the Pacific Coast.

The number of migrants is largely a matter of conjecture. Actual measurement has never been attempted, nor even seriously contemplated. Most estimates place the figure at approximately 350,000 migrant workers. It is my feeling that this figure is conservative. Certainly, if the individual estimates with respect to the influx of non-local workers into harvesting areas are totaled, the figure is completely inadequate. Such a composite total involves some duplication, and does not distinguish between inter- and intra-state migrants. It would also be based on estimates made at different dates for each of the areas involved.

The range of the broader estimate, stated as the number of workers changing their domicile in order to secure seasonal employment in agriculture, is between 350,000 and 1,100,000. Almost 50 percent of these migrants constitute the mobile working force necessary for the state of Texas; and another 25 percent are necessary for the Pacific Coast. The remainder are scattered through fourteen other states for which acceptable estimates are available. It is noteworthy, with respect to the gross figures, that they ignore any migrations that occur in the remaining thirty states of the Union.

Whether the minimum figure of 350,000 or the maximum of 1,100,000 workers be accepted as the more realistic, there is sufficient magnitude to the movement to have impressed the people of our western states with its inadequacy as a way of life.

The elementary problems of the migrant are those centering around low income. Income studies of various migrant groups show a range of annual incomes from literally nothing to as high as $1200; the model range is between $200 and $400. The chief causes of such low earnings are the intermittency and irregularity of employment, and the low wages paid for the migrants' labor.

Migration in itself has an implication of broken employment. In addition to interrupted work through movement, however, the harvesting of our crops is extremely sensitive to a number of influences. First, the amount of work that will be available is not only a function of acreages planted, but also of such other variables as insects, plant diseases, and weather conditions during the growing season. Second, weather conditions at the time of harvest may accelerate or impede the rate of harvest. In the picking of peas, for example, heavy dew, fog or rain causes all picking activities to cease, while an anticipated
hot spell stimulates the grower to get the crop off the vines as rapidly as possible.

Market prices also affect the rate of harvest. In the early crops every effort is bent toward getting the produce bound for the market before the prices begin to sag. On the other hand, once the market starts to weaken, activities slow down and may stop altogether; the operator may even allow the crops to rot in the field rather than pick and ship them at a loss. Finally, the supply of labor itself is a potent force in reducing the per capita work opportunities in each crop area. A cotton field that might afford a month's employment to a handful of workers with virtually no danger of loss to the farmer, is stripped in a few days when the labor market is glutted. Unhappily for the worker, glutted labor markets have been the rule rather than the exception during the past decade.

The only possible outcome of this erratic employment and the low wages offered is widespread material poverty. Material poverty in turn leads inevitably to hunger, improper clothing and improper shelter.

But these are common to all under-privileged groups. The migrant agricultural worker, in addition, however, suffers from discrimination in relief, community hostility, and loss of the voting franchise. He also shares with all other agricultural workers the discriminations of society that blindly clings to an anachronistic concept of farm life; it is assumed that the hired man is a member of a patriarchal family group, from which he will shortly begin to climb a romantic, if hypothetical, agricultural ladder.

As a result of this latter discrimination, the farm worker is excluded from all legislation affecting our working class population. He is notably omitted from all of our laws with regard to social insurance, wages and hours, and labor relations.

In his triple disadvantaged status—poor, mobile and agricultural—he menaces the community even as his own well being is menaced. And we might well regard all approaches to the problems of the migrant's health, his housing, the education of his children, and his low and uncertain income, as subsidiary to the broader problem of making him a responsible, self-respecting member of organized society.

As it is now, great sections of our rural economy are confronted with an irrationally drifting proletariat that has lost, or is rapidly losing, the cultures, traditions and intimacy of normal community life, and the social contacts it once possessed. It moves in a breeding ground of unrest; it is at once indispensable, hated and exploited; what personal liberty it has left is not bound by any normal ties to social responsibility; it is symptomatic of a breakdown in the traditional American ideal of farming as a way of family life and as a bulwark of our democratic institutions.

Any approach to the problems raised by the migratory existence of
these large bodies of people, must involve a coordinated attack on two phases of the agricultural situation. First, there must be an attack upon the conditions which are creating large supplies of labor which can find no other means of livelihood than that discovered through migration. Second, there must be an attack on that form of agricultural economy which requires a large labor supply, available for sporadic and chaotic employment, from day to day as the need arises.

It is the first of these conditions that has worried the Department of Agriculture more than any other. So far, however, we have admittedly been baffled in meeting those conditions, first, that are responsible for the creation of extra-large surpluses of rural populations; and, second, that have closed other sections of the national economy against the entrance of rural young people. Market conditions, the crop control program, the development of technological processes, and economic conditions that have encouraged the concentration of holdings—all have resulted in the displacement of rural populations from previously established positions at a more rapid rate than has prevailed in the past. Floods, droughts, pestilence and wasted lands have been equally significant.

As these people find the doors to urban employment closed, and no free land to bring under cultivation, they take to the road seeking agricultural employment; or they drift to cities and towns to find that there are no jobs there, and that they are ineligible for relief, and then turn, in desperation, to migratory searches for odd jobs in the industry that they already know so well.

The major contribution of the Department of Agriculture in meeting this phase of the problem has been represented by the program of the Farm Security Administration. The major effort of this agency has been to salvage what it can for marginal farm operators. The Rehabilitation program of the Farm Security Administration has, in the past four years, reached approximately 750,000 marginal farm families. The program has secured better terms of tenure for tenants and sharecroppers, has gained a downward adjustment of the individual indebtedness to the extent of about $75,000,000, has increased the net worth of its clients by an average of over $250—a 37 percent increase, has increased the total annual net income—cash and kind—of the clients by, we conservatively estimate, about 40 percent, and has redeemed millions of acres of wasting farm lands for productive cultivation. Even such a record of successful operation on the part of the Farm Security Administration, has, however, probably been of very little significance in view of what has been happening in the field of agriculture during the last ten years; it has probably retarded only slightly the displacement trends that are responsible for most of the agricultural migrants now on the road.

The limitations of the program are obvious. The major limitations are the inavailability of good land to sustain the growing rural population, and the lack of a sufficiently broad market to absorb what it
would be necessary for that farming population to produce. Of less significance is the limitation upon funds, and the difficulty of securing personnel qualified for the difficult tasks of supervising the re-education of the clients and the re-direction of farming practices, which are essentials of the rehabilitation program.

As social workers, you are probably more interested in the program of the Department of Agriculture directed to the second part of the problem—our efforts to alleviate directly the social and economic conditions of agricultural workers. In view of the greater magnitude of the problems on the Pacific Coast, it has been only natural that our first efforts should be expended there. These efforts are organized in three phases: first, direct amelioration of conditions through the development of a labor camp program, co-ordinated with health and relief programs; second, partial stabilization of farm labor families through the development of labor homes and gardens; and, third, reestablishment of migratory farm families as independent farm operators.

The first phase of the program has, as its primary aim, the personal and social rehabilitation of the migratory families. It is intended to provide social recognition to the families, to give them a place in community life, to reestablish social contact. It is accompanied by a health program which includes both corrective and preventive medicine. It is also accompanied by a relief program for the benefit of those who are denied eligibility in any other state or federal program of assistance.

This program to date is represented by the construction of over 7,000 shelters, or shelter arrangements, with adequate sanitary facilities, in seven states of the West and South. More are planned for the next fiscal year. Medical aid has been extended through medical associations established and subsidized by the Farm Security Administration; and clinics have been installed on every camp site. State and local public health facilities have cooperated with the program to provide much more adequate assistance than would otherwise have been possible. The Works Progress Administration and the National Youth Administration, also, have assisted in a comprehensive way, especially in the development of community activities, in the provision of educational leadership, and in the recreation of social consciousness by the migrant families.

The labor homes program is based upon the hope that it may be possible for a stabilized labor force to serve the needs of a commercialized agriculture. With the assistance of state and federal employment services, we hope that it may be possible for many and eventually most of the migratory farm labor families to become stabilized in communities, in or from which they can find supplementary employment to round out their year's activities. A small part of their employment, we hope, may come from agricultural operations which they themselves can carry on. These operations will, for the most part, merely contribute to their dietary supplies. So far, we have built only 850 of these labor homes, but we are hoping for authority to extend this program.
Eventually, we believe a sound agricultural economy must diversify and adjust itself as not to require large bodies of labor for very short periods of time. This is the second outstanding fundamental of our agricultural economy which must be attacked if we are to have a satisfactory solution of the migratory farm labor situation.

The major part of the third phase of this work has been directed towards resettlement of migratory farm families as operators of individual farms. An experimental part of the program, however, has involved the establishment of farm labor cooperatives in which the families are engaged in farming operations under managers whom they employ, on tracts of land which they themselves own as a collective group. These operations, last year, yielded net incomes of about $1000 to each of the participating families.

In conclusion, let me say that we are not unaware of the fact that social reform in industry has been made possible by the realization on the part of a neutral public that profits, and not humanitarian sentiments, motivate our industrial employers; a realization that commercialism, heartlessness and impersonal relationships are essential to industrial survival; and a consequent realization that certain social controls must be used to soften the impact of this otherwise rigorous system on the industrial worker. A similar consciousness that farming is equally motivated by profit and is just as fiercely competitive is essential to comprehensive reform in the field of agricultural labor. Until it comes, poverty in this field will be regarded as evidence of lack of individual enterprise and initiative; the migratory worker will be a burden to the community because he is lazy, and not because he doesn't earn enough; and the "poor trash" will be despised as perverse rather than as poor people.

Extension to agricultural workers of the social security laws, the wages and hours laws, and the labor relations act would undoubtedly tend to ameliorate some of the harsher aspects of the conditions prevailing among farm workers, and would afford them legal protection in partially working out their own solutions of their difficulties. Uniform state settlement laws and uniform standards of relief, perhaps with federal assistance through grants-in-aid, would further improve the situation.

Returning to our own program, we recognize its essentially ameliorative nature as distinguished from more fundamental remedial steps that might be taken. Much needs to be done in controlling the rate of outflow of removal migrants from those areas where wisdom or the trends of agriculture indicate continuing de-population or where surplus populations will continue to develop. Much needs to be done toward the permanent stabilization, on the few remaining lands available, of those who have been uprooted but who are genuinely competent to continue as farmers.

In the eyes of professional social service workers, some of the activities upon which we are already engaged are viewed with misgivings. Camp sites are quite properly regarded as inadequate housing accommodations. Relief in kind, as we have frequently disbursed it, is not in
accordance with high professional standards. We are inconsistent with high standards of medical aid and low standards of direct relief. Nevertheless, we ask your indulgence on these and other points. The camps, for instance, are the only solution that is consistent with existing mores and with the concrete problems that face us in this case. On the score of our objectives—feeding certain hungry people, providing them with necessary medical aid and certain minimum decencies of sanitation under the limited authorities granted us—we believe that we have done a good job and will do a better one.