

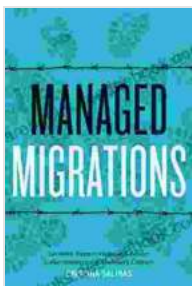
# Growers, Farmworkers, and Border Enforcement in the Twentieth Century

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The relationship between growers, farmworkers, and border enforcement in the twentieth century was marked by a complex interplay of economic, social, and political factors. This article explores the historical evolution of this relationship, highlighting the ways in which growers' labor needs, farmworkers' struggles for fair treatment, and government policies shaped border enforcement practices.

## Settling the West and the Demand for Farm Labor

As the United States expanded westward in the late nineteenth century, so too did the need for farm labor. The vast agricultural lands of the West provided ample opportunities for farming, but there was a shortage of workers to cultivate these lands. To meet this labor demand, growers increasingly turned to immigrants, particularly those from Mexico.



## Managed Migrations: Growers, Farmworkers, and Border Enforcement in the Twentieth Century

by Susan Higginbotham

★★★★☆ 4 out of 5

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Mexican farmworkers, or braceros, first arrived in the United States in significant numbers during the early 1900s. They were drawn by the availability of jobs and the promise of higher wages. However, they also faced discrimination and exploitation, including low pay, dangerous working conditions, and segregation from American society.

### **The Bracero Program and Guest Workers**

During the 1940s and 1950s, the United States government implemented the Bracero Program, which allowed Mexico and the United States to legally contract for temporary foreign workers during World War II and the post-war years. The program was designed to address the labor shortages in the agricultural industry caused by the war.

Braceros were primarily Mexican farmworkers who were brought into the United States to fill jobs that American workers were unwilling or unable to do. They worked under contracts that typically lasted six to nine months. While the Bracero Program provided some benefits to farmworkers, such as guaranteed wages and transportation, it also reinforced the cycle of exploitation, as braceros were often subjected to poor working conditions and discrimination.

### **Border Enforcement and the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986**

As the number of undocumented immigrants crossing the border from Mexico increased in the 1970s and 1980s, the federal government's focus

shifted toward border enforcement. In 1986, Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which made it a crime for employers to knowingly hire undocumented immigrants.

IRCA also included a provision for amnesty for undocumented immigrants who had been living in the United States for at least five years. While IRCA provided a pathway to legal status for some farmworkers, it also had a significant impact on the agricultural industry, as growers struggled to find enough legal workers to meet their labor needs.

### **The H-2A Visa Program**

In response to the labor shortage created by IRCA, Congress created the H-2A visa program in 1986. This program allows employers to hire temporary foreign workers for agricultural jobs that cannot be filled by American workers.

The H-2A visa program has been criticized for its exploitative practices, including low wages, unsafe working conditions, and retaliation against workers who complain. However, it remains the primary legal mechanism for growers to hire foreign workers.

### **Farmworkers' Struggles for Fair Treatment**

Throughout the twentieth century, farmworkers fought for fair treatment and improved working conditions. They organized labor unions, such as the United Farm Workers (UFW), to demand better wages, benefits, and housing. They also engaged in strikes and boycotts to raise awareness of their plight.

Farmworkers' struggles achieved some significant victories, including higher wages and improved working conditions. However, they continued to face discrimination, exploitation, and deportation.

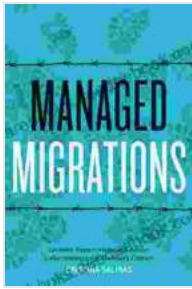
## **Contemporary Issues**

Today, the relationship between growers, farmworkers, and border enforcement remains complex and challenging. Growers continue to rely on immigrant labor, while farmworkers face many of the same issues that they did a century ago, including low pay, poor working conditions, and discrimination.

Border enforcement policies continue to shape the lives of farmworkers and their families. The Trump administration's "zero tolerance" policy, which resulted in the separation of families at the border, had a devastating impact on migrant farmworkers.

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The relationship between growers, farmworkers, and border enforcement in the twentieth century has been shaped by a complex interplay of economic, social, and political factors. Growers' labor needs, farmworkers' struggles for fair treatment, and government policies have all played a significant role in shaping the history of border enforcement in the United States. Today, the relationship between these three groups remains complex and challenging, with farmworkers continuing to face exploitation and discrimination.



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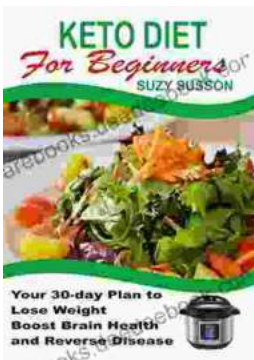
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