

Report on The Bracero Program



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April 2023

Bracero Program Legislative Report and Recommendations

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Legislative Directive

The Oregon Advocacy Commissions Office (OACO) administers four Governor appointed Commissions which serve underrepresented communities in Oregon, sharing their expertise and knowledge to inform state policy. One of the commissions that OACO supports is the Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs (OCHA). OCHA is a catalyst that empowers partnerships between the state government and Hispanic communities in rural and urban areas to ensure success for all Latino/a/x people by addressing issues at the policy level. Nina Gallo, a concerned Oregonian, contacted OCHA regarding the lack of acknowledgment of the Bracero program. OACO has been tasked with preparing a report and recommendations for use by the Legislature. The following report fulfills that directive.

Membership

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Executive Summary

The Bracero Program began in 1942 in response to the lack of American farm workers due to World War II. Mexico and the United States formed the Emergency Farm Labor Program to meet the agricultural needs of the United States and the employment needs of Mexico. Mexico would provide farm workers, called Braceros if the United States would provide adequate housing, food, health care, and wages. Instead, Braceros were met with discrimination, withholding of salaries, and the threat of deportation if they did not comply with farmers' demands.

Oregon's economy has greatly benefited from the exploited, underpaid labor of the Braceros. Since Braceros were working agricultural jobs, women were able to enter the workforce. In addition, farmers were able to keep more of their profit since they were not accountable to pay Braceros a livable wage. White Oregonians are choosing to ignore the mistreatment of Bracero throughout history. It is important to acknowledge the mistreatment of the Latino/a/x community in Oregon, celebrate their contributions, and right the wrongs.

OCHA is a government agency that empowers partnerships between the state government and Hispanic communities in rural and urban areas. In July 2022, OCHA was contacted by Nina Gallo, a concerned Oregonian, who believes the Bracero Program needs to be recognized as a state holiday.

Based on the information gathered, OCHA recommends the Oregon Legislature consider:

1. A statewide recognized holiday to acknowledge the history of the Braceros.
2. The history and impact of the Bracero program be taught in schools around the state.
3. The Braceros or descendants of Braceros are to be paid for the labor provided to the United States.

By following these steps, Oregon can better recognize the history of our state and country.

Introduction and Background

On July 27, 2022, Nina Gallo contacted OCHA (see Appendix for full letter). As a concerned Oregonian, she believes that the Bracero Program needs to be recognized as a state holiday. The Emergency Farm Labor Supply Program, also known as the Bracero Program, began in 1942; this program helped aid the United States during WWII. From the years 1942 to 1965, millions of Mexicans aided the U.S. while American men left to fight for their country.

The letter to OCHA states,

“Throughout our country’s history, the contributions of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) are consistently erased, from the genocide of Indigenous peoples who were stewards of the land before colonization to the failure to acknowledge that America was built on the backs of enslaved people, and the forgotten use of imported, cheap labor in the form of the Bracero Program. There is no doubt that Oregon benefited from this labor both economically and socially.”

“I believe that this appreciation needs to be revived and extended so we don’t forget who stepped up when Oregon desperately needed help. To have this recognition would mean that the contributions of past, present and future Hispanic Oregonians will not go unnoticed or be forgotten.”

- Ms. Gallo

OCHA is a catalyst that empowers partnerships between the state government and Hispanic communities in rural and urban areas to ensure success for all Latino/a/x people by addressing issues at the policy level. Our Statutory Goals and Strategic Priorities include:

- Advocate for fair policies assuring the success of Latino and Hispanic Oregonians at the state level.
- Engage state partners to promote equity for Latino/a/x statewide.
- Study and analyze issues affecting the Hispanic community statewide and recommend program remedies to state policymakers.
- Increase the viability and visibility of the contributions and achievements of Hispanic Oregonians statewide.¹

¹ Oregon Advocacy Commission, “Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs (OCHA).”

I. History of the Program

The Bracero Program Overview

Assigned on August 4, 1942, the Bracero Program was established as a government-to-government temporary emergency measure. Due to World War II and the attack on Pearl Harbor, there was a labor shortage in the agricultural sector. The US identified itself as “a country in need of the talents of those outside our national frontiers.”² Meanwhile, Mexico experienced devastating drought and a lack of water and seeds in the years before World War II.³

Mexico’s need for food and employment and the US's lack of agricultural employment led to bilateral talks, thus forming the Emergency Farm Labor Program.⁴ In 1942, this agreement was supposed to take up to six months with guaranteed wages, health care, and adequate housing for the Braceros.⁵ Oregon State College (now known as Oregon State University) administered the Bracero federal program. Growers in the Pacific Northwest imported over 40,000 Bracero farmworkers, composing the first major wave of ethnic Mexicans who came to the region. Labor shortages in Oregon, especially the Hood River area, threatened Americans' livelihoods by putting years of hard work and investments at stake. Mexican workers filled the labor shortage and harvested most of the crops during this time of economic disparity.⁶



The Braceros entered a world of intensely negative social living environments charged with discrimination and hate. The Bracero workers’ race took precedence over their quality of work, causing their helpfulness to be overlooked. Signs reading “No Dogs, Negros, Mexicans” hung

throughout the country. The U.S. government even censored all the Bracero workers’ communication.⁷

(Visual Aid credit to Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia.

<https://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/what.htm>, Ret. March 17, 2023).

² Maria Elena Bickerton, “Prospects for Bilateral Immigration Agreement with Mexico: Lessons from the Bracero Program,” *Texas Law Review* [79], no. [4] (2001): 898.

³ Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

⁴ Lilla Fernandez, “Of Immigrants and Migrants: Mexican and Puerto Rican Labor Migration in Comparative Perspective, 1942-1964,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* [29], no. [3], (2010): 51.

⁵ Elizabeth W. Mandeel. “The Bracero Program 1942-1964,” *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* [4], no. [1] (2014): 171-184.

⁶ Mario Jimenez Sifuentez, *Of Forest and Fields: Mexican Labor in the Pacific Northwest* (Rutgers University Press, 2016).

⁷ Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor & World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (University of Washington Press, 2000).

Treatment of the Braceros across the country varied. The Pacific Northwest gave Braceros a holistic discriminatory experience. The workers endured racially discriminatory attitudes from employers and local communities alike. From hospitals refusing to care for Braceros to being forbidden to enter certain businesses, communities did not welcome Braceros kindly.

“Not long thereafter, the camp manager at Medford, Oregon, reported that a Mexican national was attacked in public ‘without provocation’ and severely injured by five young men.” Idaho and Texas were blacklisted by the Mexican government for the mistreatment of Braceros, resulting in a PL-45.

“Prejudice became so common and deep-seated that in 1946 the Mexican government threatened to forbid its workers to go into the state and two years later made good on its threat.⁸”

Many issues arose from the implementation of the Bracero program such as illegal immigration, abuse of labor, and heightened labor injuries. Legislators passed several laws to improve the treatment of the Braceros, however, these issues contributed to the demise of the Bracero program in 1964. The legislative push for better treatment and wages prompted the establishment of the H-2A visa program.

Discrimination from Local Community

During this time, Mexican workers grew exponentially into mostly white, non-diverse rural neighborhoods of Oregon. They were discriminated against; racial slurs and segregated drinking fountains were common across the state. Sometimes, Bracero workers were even forced to remain on the farm base.⁹

Braceros were discriminated against on and off the farm. Some growers built segregated worker camps: one for whites, one for blacks, and one for Mexicans. The concessionaire’s profits are derived from the difference between what the grower could charge the Braceros and the expenses to provide food. The cheaper the food provided to eat, the more profit he was able to make. For example, in 1943, in Grants Pass, Oregon, 500 Braceros suffered food poisoning from poor-quality food, one of the most severe cases reported in the Northwest. The Mexican government intervened in 1945 because of the poor quality of food.¹⁰

Physical labor had the most debilitating long-term effects. Farmers forced Braceros to use the “*cortito*,” or short hoe; which is now illegal. To effectively use the short hoe, you must bend over, or stoop, constantly. Using this tool caused substantial damage to the workers’ bodies. Farmers also assigned Braceros to operate heavy machinery, which was against the federal agreement.¹¹

⁸ Gamboa, *Mexican Labor & World War II*.

⁹ Gamboa, *Mexican Labor & World War II*.

¹⁰ Robert Bauman, “Jim Crow in the Tri-Cities, 1943-1950,” *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* [91], no. [3] (2005): 125.

¹¹ Sifuentez, *Of Forest and Fields*.

The Reaction to Unionization

Unions were formed to address the issues like wages, living conditions, and injuries of the Bracero and Mexican farmworkers. Cesar E. Chavez and Dolores Huerta helped Braceros find power in their voices. Chavez and Huerta founded The National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) around the premise that the farmworkers' struggle was part of a much broader movement for civil rights. The ongoing Black Freedom Struggle provided both inspiration and allies to farmworkers, drawing parallels between the Jim Crow South and rural California in the fight for racial justice.

Latino/a/x people worked with the state of Oregon to create their own Oregon's Pineros Y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN) as a union for farm workers in 1985. Their mission was to gain collective bargaining rights. PCUN continues to advocate and work hard for Mexican residents in Oregon.

The efforts of the NFWA and PCUN unions brought forth action to all Braceros across the U.S. NFWA led a series of marches, national consumer boycotts, and fasts to protest working conditions. NFWA attracted national headlines and gained labor contracts with higher wages and improved working conditions, galvanizing the Chicano movement.

Strikes

The treatment of the Bracero population finally exploded into full-blown strikes. Strikes took place all across America. Topics that raised awareness included:

1. Housing and food being substandard
2. Contracts often violated
3. Prevalent violence
4. Length of workdays

Braceros found ways to resist their employers and attempt to improve living conditions and wages in the Pacific Northwest work camps. One common method used to increase their wages was "loading sacks" which consisted of filling their harvest bags with rocks to make their bags heavier.¹² Over two dozen strikes were held in the first two years of the program; this allowed Braceros in the Pacific Northwest to receive better wages, food, and housing.

Differences Between Laborers in the Pacific Northwest and the South

Treatment both on and off the farm impacted the Braceros' lives greatly. Most Braceros did not know the locations they were going to when they entered the United States. Oregon was one of the further states from Mexico and the cold climate took some adjustment. Southern states took on the brunt of these Bracero agreements and benefited greatly. However, during this time, the political and racial climates were at an all-time high and most southern states were

¹² Sifuentez, *Of Forest and Fields*.

pro-segregation. Braceros received similar horrible treatment to that of Blacks and other non-white races.¹³ For instance, in the early years of the program, Mexico objected to Texas being included in the program, citing the state's notorious racism against Mexican nationals, but was dissuaded after 1946. Mexico also wanted to exclude Idaho since the state approved rules forcing *braceros* to stay at their assigned job or face arrest and provide "forced, unpaid labor while awaiting trial."¹⁴

II. Impact on Workers and Their Families

Separation

The legal length agreed upon for the Bracero program was six weeks to six months. However, many Braceros who traveled farther north stayed longer to maximize their earnings. Sometimes staying in the U.S. for 4-6 years at a time. This long period away from family brought much turmoil to the Bracero households. Some Braceros returned while others did not.¹⁵

Braceros who stayed in the U.S. left their loved ones behind for decades. Braceros searched for ways to save their earnings to support their families. In the US, they worked hard to find a home for themselves. The only way to communicate their intentions for their families' futures was through the mail. The government destroyed any letters expressing unfair working conditions and emotional or sexual desires. The government feared permanent settlement of Bracero families in the US, as the program was designed as a temporary workforce that would be returned back to Mexico.¹⁶

Bracero's prospective in-laws were wary of men who had a history of abandoning their families in Mexico in hopes of good wages in the U.S. As a result, Bracero men who wished to marry had to repress their longing. Braceros had to demonstrate they could show strength in emotional aspects, worthy of their future spouses. It was frowned upon for women to voice their concerns about the stability of their relationships. Especially, when they spoke of their sexual and emotional desires, as it was deemed socially, religiously, and culturally inappropriate.¹⁷

Withholding of Salaries

Farmers led Braceros astray when it came to their pay. Farmers used deductions and other means to withhold Bracero's pre-negotiated federal wages. Bracero's wage schedules changed frequently to provide employers with increased profit. This practice happened so often that many Braceros

¹³ Sifuentez, *Of Forest and Fields*.

¹⁴ Dallas Morning News, "Bracero Timeline," 2002.

¹⁵ Lawrence A. Cardoso, "Floodtide of the 1920s," *Mexican Emigration to the United States, 1897-1931*. (University of Arizona, 2019): 71-95.

¹⁶ Cardoso, *Mexican Emigration to the United States, 1897-1931*.

¹⁷ Gamboa, *Mexican Labor & World War II*.

did not know how much they would be paid. On the most labor-intensive days, the pay was worse and at a piece rate.

Types of illegal deductions Braceros were forced to pay:

1. \$1.75 was supposed to come out of pay every day for food provided at cost, however, the money could be kept if the workers cooked their own food.
2. Workers who opposed or questioned farmers were sent back to Mexico.¹⁸
3. Workers were forced to have additional insurance and the cost would come out of pay, however, the money would go directly to growers, and no insurance was given.¹⁹
4. Between 1953 and 1958, workers in the farm industry increased by 14 percent, but Bracero workers' wages had either decreased or stayed the same.²⁰
5. In 1952, illegal deductions were taken out of California Bracero's pay.²¹
6. During the program, Mexico withheld 10% of Bracero's pay for "savings" but in reality, the government sent that money to a Mexican bank to hold and never gave to the Braceros.²²

In the agreement with the Mexican government, ten percent of the wages earned by Braceros must be put into savings schemes, to be deposited into Mexican banks and withdrawn upon their return. But the Braceros never received this money. Later, reparations were made to the Bracero workers and the Mexican government, however, millions of dollars went unnoticed, were never accounted for, and never paid to the Braceros and their families.²³

Deportation

Farmers used deportation as a means of control and forced Braceros to perform their tasks. If they resisted, deportation was threatened. Even when Braceros completed their tasks, farmers would call the authorities to have them deported. This unfair practice granted farmers free labor while keeping the Bracero in constant fear.

Coined in 1920, "wetback" was a derogatory term to describe a Mexican citizen crossing the Rio Grande River illegally into the US for a job. These migrants were also taken advantage of for farm labor, a practice still common today. Farmers, growers, and Border Patrol would round up the migrants, take them to a processing center, and force them to reach a toe across the border to Mexico before legalizing their Bracero status in the US. This process was referred to as "drying out," which enabled growers to acquire farmworkers. In the fiscal year of 1950, only 19,813 Braceros were admitted while 96,239 migrants were "dried out" and turned into Braceros.²⁴

¹⁸ Ana Elizabeth Rosas, "Breaking the Silence: Mexican Children and Women's Confrontation of Bracero Family Separation, 1942-64," *Gender & History* [23], no. [2] (2011).

¹⁹ Ernesto Galarza, *Strangers in Our Fields*, (Joint United States-Mexico Trade Union Committee, 1956).

²⁰ Don Mitchell, *They Saved the Crops*, (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2012).

²¹ Mitchell, *They Saved the Crops*.

²² Gloria Ibanez, "Mexico Withheld 10 Percent of Bracero's Salary; Braceros Want it Back," *Yakima Herald-Republic* (2017).

²³ Gilbert Gonzalez, *Harvest of Loneliness*, Film, directed by: Vivian Price & Adrian Salinas (2010, New York, NY: Films Media Group), DVD.

²⁴ Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story*, (San Jose, California, McNally & Loftin, 1964).

III. Impact on the Local Economy

Positive Impacts During World War II

This agreement positively affected the US, providing countless women and children with food. Farmers profited greatly from the Braceros since they had helped maintain large acres of crops. This program offered an excess number of workers, high profits with low wages, and a stable economy. “The Bracero men provided a stable and reliable workforce that farmers counted on.”²⁵

World War II granted women access to the workforce, which helped women to be seen as more than homemakers, fueling the women’s liberation movement. Women entered the workforce to earn money to sustain their households. They learned trades and crafts that were previously unavailable to them. Household gender roles evolved during this time and brought about the notion of the two-income household that remains today.

Suppression of Bracero’s Wages Post-War

Wage suppression persisted post-WWII. Returning American soldiers from World War II were expected to return to their previously held jobs. When they returned, they worked alongside the Braceros. Before the war, farmworkers made minimum wage. Post-war, Braceros were making cents on the dollar. Descendants of Braceros and the Latino/a/x community continue to be exploited and capitalized on today. The Bracero program set the precedent for the abuse of Hispanic guest workers, whose wages decreased between 2004 and 2014.²⁶

The Continuation of the Program and the Aftermath

“After 1946- As soon as the government turned the responsibility for recruitment over to the employers, guest workers were exploited and abused.”²⁷

In response to American soldiers coming home, farmers stopped keeping proper records and continued to pay Branceros unlivable wages. This led to the notable disappearance of Braceros. Although the program officially ended in 1965, the need for work remained. The Mexican population still depended on the wages they received from the US. The dire need for work created massive surges of legal and undocumented migration to the US and persists today.

“Under pressure from the agricultural lobby, the US government extended it until 1949, maintaining the broad outlines of the program, but with key changes in its administration.”²⁸ After 1946, while the Bracero Program continued apace, undocumented immigrant numbers skyrocketed. Eager growers took advantage of available workers to whom no safeguards nor

²⁵ Galarza, *Merchants of Labor*.

²⁶ Daniel Costa. “The H-2B Temporary Foreign Worker Program,” *Economic Policy Institute* (2016).

²⁷ Aili Palmnen, “Learning From the Mistakes of the Past: An Analysis of Past and Current Temporary Workers Policies and Their Implication for a Twenty-First Century Guest-Worker Program,” *Kennedy School Review* [6] (2005).

²⁸ Aili Palmnen, “Learning From the Mistakes of the Past: An Analysis of Past and Current Temporary Workers Policies and Their Implication for a Twenty-First Century Guest-Worker Program.”

conditions applied. The influx of undocumented immigrants in the 1970 census reported: “70 percent of 105,000 ‘Hispanic origin’ residents in Washington and Oregon lived in the urban areas. Eighty-six percent of Mexicans lived in only twenty-two counties in the Northwest, and the majority of those were located along the Interstate-5 corridor.²⁹” Laws such as Public Law 78, H.R. 5678 Bill, and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 led to the establishment of the H-2A visa program.

Continue Suppression of Wages for Migrant Farm Workers

As undocumented immigrants continue to surface in the US, they were only allowed to get “under-the-table jobs” that allowed an employer to pay someone off the record. “Workers live in constant fear of deportation; thus, they cannot complain about working conditions, contract violations, poor housing, or wage theft.”³⁰ Employers receive maximum labor for a fraction of the cost. They also force undocumented immigrants, guest workers, and the Latino/a/x community into involuntary servitude. This unjust and inhumane power dynamic is how this treatment has persisted for over eighty years. “Former Department of Labor official Lee G. Williams called the Bracero Program ‘legalized slavery.’³¹”

IV. Current Impact

Farmer Worker Overtime Passed 2022

In the Short Session 2022, Oregon passed House Bill 4002 Agriculture Overtime. Which put a “walk-back” model to address overtime pay in Oregon and Washington. The “Walk Back” model starts at a higher overtime threshold and then decreases each year. This includes a 1–2-year deduction starting at 55 hours strict overtime threshold in 2022. It will gradually decrease to a 40-hour threshold by 2027. California has already firmly placed a 40-hour strict overtime threshold for their agriculture sector. Other states such as Minnesota, Colorado, New York, Maryland, and Hawaii have all placed overtime thresholds in their agriculture sectors as well, ranging in hour threshold. All other states have yet to put strict laws surrounding agricultural labor. Strict laws holding state farmers accountable are needed to stop this mass profit structure.

Inequitable Treatment of the Latino/a/x Community

As of 2021, approximately 37.24 million Mexican descendants are living in the US; this makes Latino/a/x Americans the largest ethnic minority of 18.7% in the US.³² Hatred towards the Latino/a/x community grew substantially as former US President Donald Trump targeted Mexicans during his presidential campaign kickoff rally on June 16, 2015, at the Trump Tower in New York City, NY. The former president stated, “When Mexico sends its people, they're not

²⁹ Sifuentes, *Of Forest and Fields*.

³⁰ Sifuentes, *Of Forest and Fields*.

³¹ Sifuentes, *Of Forest and Fields*.

³² Pew Research Center, 2022.

sending their best... They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.”

The Latino/a/x population feels it is getting harder to remain in America. “When it comes to living in the U.S., a majority (54%) says it has become more difficult to live in the country as a Latino in recent years, while 42% say things haven’t changed much.”³³ Calling the Latino/a/x community derogatory names and spreading hate speech deepened the divide between the Latino/a/x community and other communities.

Ms. Gallo outlined the lack of awareness and appreciation for the Braceros in her letter to OCHA, stating:

“There is no doubt that Oregon benefited from this labor both economically and socially, and yet, I have had an incredibly hard time finding any kind of recognition towards the workers from the state of Oregon besides a letter from former Oregon Governor Earl Snell to the Mexican government in 1943 which expressed his gratitude. I believe that this appreciation needs to be revived and extended so we don’t forget who stepped up when Oregon desperately needed help” (Ms. Gallo).

We concur that by making it a holiday, all people will be able to learn the history of the Braceros. The Bracero Program has been forgotten and that needs to stop today! It is time for us to pay homage to the Braceros and their contributions to the United States and especially in Oregon.

Negative White Oregonian Action

Oregon has failed to acknowledge the Braceros and the work that they have done. White Oregonians choosing to ignore the truth of Braceros demonstrates the continued discrimination against these populations. U.S. history tends to omit the actions of hate, racism, or murder that our country has committed. Oregonians need to be aware of the harm that they continue to play in the inhumane treatment of the Latino/a/x population. It is time for Oregon to take ownership and acknowledge its full history, no matter how ugly it is. Oregon cannot continue to be in the business of erasing history, but rather amplifying the truth and righting its wrongs. This is why Oregon must take this stand to support making it a state holiday. Bracero's history is a part of American history.

³³ Pew Research Center, 2022.

Recommendations

1. Passing House Bill 2955 (2023) Designating August 4th as Bracero Program Day

As the heartfelt letter from Ms. Gallo stated,

“Although the Braceros worked tirelessly to provide crops to the state, the worker’s inadequate living conditions and substandard pay did not reflect any appreciation for their efforts. Without the assistance of Mexican workers, Oregon farms would have been left struggling to harvest and pick produce to feed the state, which continues to make up one of Oregon’s largest industries. It’s only fair that the Braceros be recognized for the work that they did and the sacrifices they made for Oregon.”

This is a simple request that needs to be reconciled. As Ms. Gallo has stated, “recognition” is what we ask for. The time is now to act for a community that has been silenced. Make the Bracero Program a state holiday. We call for the Braceros holiday to be held on the 4th of August since that is the day the program was introduced in 1942.

2. Call for Teaching Bracero History in Classrooms throughout Oregon

History lives on if it’s shared through generations. There are states like California that have passed a law (SB-993) that authorizes schools to teach the Bracero program. With this curriculum, no Latino/a/x child nor Bracero descendant will miss out on a critical part of their ancestor’s stories. This will also allow other students and teachers alike to be educated more diversely in the heritage of the Latino/a/x community.

3. Intergovernmental Agreement with Mexico to Repay Braceros Their 10% Withholds.

In 2001, Braceros filed a lawsuit against the governments of the United States and Mexico and Wells Fargo Bank. The Braceros would deposit money into banks in the United States, largely Wells Fargo. Then the money would be transferred to a Mexican bank, largely Banco Rural de Credito National (BanRural). There was no interest made on this money until the Braceros returned to Mexico to claim it. The lawsuit began when Wells Fargo announced that they did not deposit all the money from paychecks.

Mexican bank, BanRural, was found to be using Bracero’s paychecks to pay for day-to-day bank operations. In addition, many Braceros never returned to Mexico, therefore never receiving payment. If Braceros did move back to Mexico, BanRural would frequently deny having the

funds at all. Others were not aware funds were being held for them in Mexico. Some experts report the wages owed, including interest, are more than 500 million dollars (in American currency).

When the lawsuit was taken to the United States courts, U.S. District Judge Charles Breyer threw it out because the statute of limitations had expired. Braceros in Mexico and the United States began to protest this ruling. In response, the Mexican government promised 300 pesos (roughly 26.5 million in American currency). To receive this money, Braceros must work through the bureaucratic system of the government and produce five to eight means of identification. The committee of people that decided who would get reparations was made up of government officials and representatives from BanRural, which made this process very biased. There has been no more movement for reparations since the early 2000s in the United States.³⁴

Since technically these funds are on Wells Fargo and BanRural, it cannot fall on the State of Oregon to take on that financial burden. That being said, we propose the State of Oregon enforce these companies to repay what they have taken away from the Braceros.

United States House of Representatives has only introduced one bill and two resolutions in response to the Bracero program. 107 House Resolution 522 and 110 House Resolution 696, both expressed gratitude for the contributions the Braceros made to the United States' WWII efforts. Both Resolutions failed to provide or suggest any repayment or action steps to right the injustices Braceros have faced.

The closest the United States government got justice was 107 H.R. 4918, also called the Braceros Justice Act of 2002. Which waived certain defenses to claims brought by Braceros against the United States, Mexico, BanRural, and Wells Fargo regarding the failure to pay the Braceros in full. 107 H.R. 4918 would have waived the statute of limitations, allowing claims to be brought 2 years after the bill was passed. This would have applied to any district court in the United States and would waive the United States' Sovereign Immunity. Unfortunately, this bill never progressed past the introduction phase in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Conclusion

The Bracero program played a vital role in keeping our economy afloat during World War II. The Braceros put the U.S. in a position to thrive and become one of the wealthiest nations it is today. The U.S.'s long history has always highlighted our country's triumphs while neglecting the inhuman portions. Oregon, along with the rest of the country, needs to acknowledge the wrong

³⁴ Jennifer Osorio. "Proof of a Life Lived: The Plight of the Braceros and What it Says About How We Treat Records," *Archival Issues* [29] no. [2] (2005): 95-103.

that we have done and are still doing to profit off Braceros and the Latino/a/x community. It is pertinent that Oregon takes the right steps to expose its oppressive culture. Students need to be taught all sides of the story and recognize the harm that occurred and recognize the harms we still commit today. Righting these wrongs starts with teaching ourselves about the contributions of the Latino/a/x communities. A good way to start this process is by giving appreciation to the Bracero Program and its participants via a State Holiday, educating the history of the Braceros in schools, and repaying the withholdings that were never returned.

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Appendix

Dear Melina Moran,

I am writing this letter because I would like you and the Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs (OCHA) to honor the Mexican workers of the Emergency Farm Labor Supply Program, more commonly known as the Bracero Program, by establishing a commemorative holiday to acknowledge the contributions of the Bracero workers and their families to Oregon agriculture and history. Between 1942 and 1947, thousands of hardworking Mexican men were sent to Oregon to work in the fields due to a shortage of farmhands during World War II. During this period, the Braceros performed backbreaking labor, harvesting



sugar beets, potatoes, and many other vital crops. In the photo to the left, a man is using a picking belt, a harvesting tool in which a sack is fastened to the belt and dragged between the legs to hold crops. Although the Braceros worked tirelessly to

provide crops to the state, the worker's inadequate living conditions and substandard pay did not reflect any appreciation for their efforts. In many cities, the Braceros were met with racist attitudes and sometimes physical violence. In Medford, OR a Mexican national was brutally attacked by five men, and although the national was the one met with violence, it was he who was arrested. Acts of violence such as this demonstrate that although the Braceros were feeding the state of Oregon, they were still not respected and subjected to racism and life-threatening injustices. Without the assistance of Mexican workers, Oregon farms would have been left struggling to harvest and pick produce to feed the state, which continues to make up one of Oregon's largest industries. It's only fair that the Braceros be recognized for the work that they did and the sacrifices they made for Oregon.

Throughout our country's history, the contributions of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) are consistently erased, from the genocide of Indigenous peoples who were stewards of the land before colonization, the failure to acknowledge that America was built on the backs of enslaved peoples, and the forgotten use of imported, cheap labor in the form of the Bracero Program. There is no doubt that Oregon benefited from this labor both economically and socially, and yet, I have had an incredibly hard time finding any kind of recognition towards the workers from the State of Oregon besides a letter from former Oregon Governor Earl Snell to the Mexican government in 1943 which expressed his gratitude. I believe that this appreciation needs to be revived and extended so we don't forget who stepped up when Oregon desperately needed help.

On the OCHA webpage, it mentions one of OCHA's principles and values as being, "Celebration of and awareness about the contributions and achievements of Hispanic Oregonians" and as the chair of the Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs, I believe that you and your commission have a duty to recognize the work performed by the Braceros. Although many of the workers returned to Mexico after their contracts were up, some became permanent residents of Oregon. Regardless, I believe that all of the Braceros who came here to work have a place in our community of Hispanic Oregonians. The presence of the Braceros helped Oregon thrive during a time of great need, and not only that, but the Bracero program itself brought a new diaspora to Oregon, further enriching the state with Mexican culture, customs, and the Spanish language. Even today, many Oregon farmworkers identify as being Latinx/Hispanic. In your position of power, you have the ability to emphasize and uplift the contributions made by the Braceros and to illustrate how Oregon does not forget the efforts made by people of color, especially in a state that has historically denied the rights of BIPOC.

I hope that this letter implores you and your committee to explore the possibilities of establishing a commemorative holiday to honor the Braceros. To have this recognition would mean that the contributions of past, present and future Hispanic Oregonians will not go unnoticed or be forgotten. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Nina Gallo