1998, March
Farmworkers Challenge Mt. Olive Pickle
by Raldemar Velasquez

The Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) won a stunning victory in its unprecedented three-year agreement in 1995,36 with Campbell's Soup Co. and Midwest's produce growers (see Prisma 13:54-59, 1998). Now FLOC is about to launch an all-out campaign to induce Mt. Olive Pickle Co. to recognize farm workers' right to union representation and to redress their grievances.

You can expect this effort to make national news and draw solidarity from all over the world--unless, of course, Mt. Olive's CEOfitness from his currentsituation.

"Organize the South," said the FLOC convention delegates last August, and everthing we've learned during three decades of farmworker organizing is now being put to the test in North Carolina! Our target is the Mt. Olive Pickle Co., of Mt. Olive, N.C., largest pickle producer in the South.

It was difficult convincing farmers in Georgia and Alabama to share their resistance with us in 1991, and it was even more difficult in North Carolina.

If we had to persuade impoverished migrant workers in Ohio that they could improve their families' lives by sticking together with the union, it will be even harder in North Carolina.

If it was tough to generate support for organizing and boycotts in Ohio, it will be even tougher in the land of Jesse Helms. Raldemar Velasquez is president and founder of the Ohio-based Farm Labor Organizing Committee.

1999, December
Raleigh Sports Arena
Fouled by Toxic Dump
by Michael Steinberg

The Raleigh Entertainment and Sports Arena (ESA) opened in late October, with headlines of hoopla and hype. North Carolina State University basketball and the Carolina Hurricanes professional hockey teams now call the $155 million complex home, and James Taylor will ring in the millennium there on New Year's Eve.

But in all the frenetic media reports on the ESA's inauguration, there was no mention that its location directly adjacent to an EPA Superfund Site containing carcinogenic hazards and radioactive wastes that have leaked and contaminated the surrounding groundwater.

In the EPA's September 1996 Record of Decision (ROD) on the site, the agency declared that, "Actual or threatened releases of hazardous substances from this Site, if not addressed by implementing the proposed action selected in this ROD, may present an imminent and substantial endangerment to public health, welfare, or the environment."

Yet ever since three years later, while multimillions were devoted to the ESA--including over $100 million in public funds--and the contaminated groundwater beneath and beyond the site has not been cleaned up. And when that cleanup does begin, it will likely take 30 years.

The EPA in fact identified the site as Superfund status in 1994, and added it to its National Priorities Lists for cleanup in 1988.

Radioactive sheep, DDT, and contaminated groundwater don't stop the Hurricanes

By Michael Steinberg

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Faulty Hill

The L.5 acre site is officially known as the North Carolina State University Lake L.5 Farm Unit #1. Today it looks like a benign gray hill directly across the road from the east parking lot of the Entertainment and Sports Arena.

A chain link fence set back from the road has been thrown up in an attempt to prevent wandering closer to the site, which is set farther back from the road and surrounded by another chain link fence tormented with double strands of barbed wire.

NC State records indicate that the planters disposed of an average of 3660 pounds per month of these hazardous wastes during the 14 months of the dump operation. This included monthly averages of 500 pounds of solvents, 500 pounds of pesticides, and 559 pounds of waste oils. NCST also reports that the total volume of these wastes was 30,000 cubic feet.

1998, April

Our Community is the "Sacrificial Lamb"

Commentary by Barry Reid

The Rogers Road Community has been dubbed the "sacrificial lamb" of Orange County.

I say this having worked on countless boards and committees which at best provided an expensive education on what happens at a landfill and who doesn't want one in the backyard. I have served with public officials from Durham, Alamance, Orange, and Wake Counties. The committees were made up of mayors, commissioners, school board members, councilmen, citizens representatives and more.

We've spent tens of thousands of dollars having engineers and archaeologists attempt to answer the age-old question of what to do with this garbage.

When the studies were all complete and the reports were in, the bottom line read "big dollars to be spent by government officials." I don't know if those dollars just frightened them or if they thought they would lose face if they failed to come up with what the studies recommend. But whether they sold the rest or gave away the farm, the answer was the same:

We're not going to move this garbage, we're going to put it in a landfill and we're going to hope for the best.

In short, the studies suggested that the governing bodies necessity justify this massive investment as a means of handling solid waste. This in itself seemed to be the first of the driving wedges. The second wedge was the price tag hanging over the system. I thought that was the first question of how much it would cost to contain all the garbage.

These questions were never put to the community as a whole, in the form of a questionnaire or debate in a public forum.

Yet, it was decided by each governing body that this price tag, and the suggested means of handling solid waste, was in fact more controversial than landfills or having to site another landfill. My submission is that the community didn't have the information, or the opportunity to address the issue.

There is no way, as I stated at the beginning of this article, that the public should be left in the dark or be denied the opportunity to address a project which will adversely affect their health, welfare, or the environment.

My conclusion is that those who would move this garbage and avoid the hassle have already decided where this garbage will go.

L.5 is in the indisputable hands of the State Legislature which is not in the business of serving the people but in the business of serving those who are attempting to avert the inevitable from happening. So it is up to the people in the Rogers Road Community to make sure that those who are trying to force this garbage on us are held accountable for what they are doing.

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