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Rural California Report is a quarterly publication of the California Institute for Rural Studies (CIRS). For over twenty years CIRS has conducted research and outreach aimed at improving lives, conditions and economies of rural areas. The missions of CIRS is to work toward a society that is socially just, economically sustainable and ecologically balanced. To achieve this goal, we conduct policy research that takes an integrated approach to issues affecting rural communities, rural economies and rural environments, with a primary focus on agricultural labor markets.

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LETTERS

Rural California Report welcomes letters from its readers. If you have a comment, criticism or suggestion, we would like your feedback. Address correspondence to: The California Institute for Rural Studies; RCR/ Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 2143; Davis, CA 95617. Or email the editor: jdsherman@ucdavis.edu

Jose Millan Named State Labor Commissioner

by Don Villarejo

In a surprise move, Jose Millan was appointed State Labor Commissioner of California by Governor Wilson on July 22, 1997. He heads an agency with 300 employees who are responsible for enforcement of workplace labor laws throughout the state. Millan is the first Latino to head the agency in more than half a century.

Millan had served for a decade in the agency, rising through the ranks to become Assistant State Labor Commissioner before resigning on August 31, 1996. Among his notable achievements was directing the Targeted Industries Partnership Program (TIPP) from its inception in September

employer education with surprise raids or sweeps that bring dozens of enforcement staff into workplaces with suspected violations. The program has concentrated its efforts in just two industries: agriculture and the cut-and-sew garment manufacturing industry. These industries have been "targeted" because of the high levels of labor law violations known to occur in them.

Millan's notoriety reached national proportions when he personally led a raid in 1995 into an El Monte apartment complex that was actually a secret garment sweatshop. Some 70 Thai nationals were being held in slavery by the owners. It was also determined that city and federal agencies were aware of the situation

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1992 until he left. Then Labor Commissioner Victoria Bradshaw initiated this unusual program in an effort to forge a link between the disparate agencies, and bring together their limited enforcement resources (See "Labor Commissioner Discusses Targeted Industries Partnership Program's First Year," *RCR* Vol. 5, No. 3, Winter 1994; "TIPP: Multi-Agency Effort to Enforce Labor Standards," *RCR* Vol. 7, No. 2, Fall 1996).

TIPP is a joint federal-state program combining workplace and

for at least two years before Millan's raid but did nothing about it. Upon learning of the situation, Millan immediately put together a strike force and went in without waiting for immigration officials, freeing the Thai workers and arresting the business owners. Later, a combined total of more than \$1 million in back wages was awarded to the workers.

Just ten days after his appointment as Labor Commissioner, Millan personally led an inspection of farm worker housing near the northern San

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Diego County community of Escondido. Dozens of indigenous Mexican migrants, mostly Mixtec and Zapotec, were found living in rat-infested shacks.

Millan has indicated that he would like to expand the TIPP program, possibly into another industry. He has also reportedly been somewhat critical of the U.S. Department of Labor's much-heralded program of "garment industry self-regulation," which former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich lauded as a model of how an industry can act to clean up its own problems with minimal government intervention. Recent raids in Los Angeles area garment shops revealed a plethora of labor and safety law violations by some of the leading companies participating in the self-regulation program.

When he resigned as Assistant State Labor Commissioner in August 1996, he was known to have been disappointed by being passed over for the position of labor commissioner in favor of Roberta Mendonca. But she failed to win state Senate confirmation earlier this year, largely because of opposition by labor and Democratic party leaders to her conservative views. Some saw the vote against her as retaliation against the Governor over the Industrial Welfare Commission's scrapping of mandatory overtime pay in California after eight hours of work.

Millan's experience and fluency in Spanish are a decided plus for the TIPP program. Both the agricultural and garment industry labor forces are composed nearly entirely of immigrants; many are Spanish-speaking.



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pasture is being converted to more intensive crops, yielding much higher crop values per acre. In fact, farm cash receipts per acre can be ten times larger when converted in this manner.

When orchards or vineyards near an urban center are paved over, some may conclude that this is an irreplaceable loss of these commodities. What has actually occurred is that other land, most often far from urban areas, is being converted from *extensive* to *intensive* crops. The total of these latter types of conversions has clearly greatly exceeded conversions of cropland to urban use. Thus, the net change of land use is both an overall decrease of cropland and an increase in land used for intensive crop purposes.

California today has more land planted to orchards (trees and vines) than ever in its entire history. In 1996, more than 25,000 acres of vines were planted, mostly of wine varieties. This growth is clearly a response to the current boom in wine production.

While the loss of agricultural land to development does represent an irreplaceable decrease in the amount of natural resources available for farming, the conversion of other land from extensive to intensive farming purposes is a response to growing markets for fruit, nuts and vegetables. One of the important consequences of these conversions is a significant increase in the demand for manual labor, ironically contributing to additional population growth in the region. This hand-in-hand increase of production value and of labor demand shows no sign of abating: as far into the future as anyone can see, both will continue to grow.



(IMMIGRANTS from page 4)

assimilation patterns among immigrants, and concludes that most immigrants assimilate within just a generation or two due to intermarriage and acculturation of native-born children. The report closes without making any policy recommendations and without presenting any final conclusions. These are not easy to draw from the extensive, and occasionally contradictory data and analysis presented throughout the report. The one clear message that comes through is that immigration is not as big of a problem as it is sometimes perceived to be. It is not occurring any more rapidly today than it was 50 years ago, nor is there any indication that the current wave of immigrants will have greater trouble assimilating with time into mainstream American society.



Please join us for dinner and dancing at the

CIRS 20th Anniversary Celebration

Saturday, November 22, 1997
6:30 to 10:00 p.m. in Davis

Ticket prices are \$15 individual, \$25 for two or \$100 for a table of eight. Music will be provided by the Dick Livingston Trio. For event and ticket information, call (916) 756-6555, ext. 12. We look forward to celebrating with you.