

# Rural California Report

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*Rural California Report* is a quarterly publication of the California Institute for Rural Studies. CIRS is an independent nonprofit research and advocacy group which has studied rural issues and policies since 1977. The institute's goal is to build a society that is ecologically balanced, socially just, and economically sustainable. Toward those objectives, CIRS conducts research and public education projects, and works with individual activists in rural communities.

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## Elections signal revived UFW

By Don Villarejo

**T**HE SPRING AND SUMMER OF 1994 saw a wave of new union representation elections at the state's agricultural work sites. The United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO, (UFW) won elections at seven farms, the result of UFW President Arturo Rodriguez's recent pledge to devote significant new resources to field organizing (see chart below). Supervised by the state's Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB), these elections saw the UFW earn more than two-thirds of the 1,104 votes cast.

The most significant victory, according to Philip Martin, an agricultural economics professor at the University of California, Davis, was the close contest at Oceanview Produce, a subsidiary of Dole Fresh Vegetables. When the votes were tallied, the UFW had won representation rights by a razor-thin margin of 298 to 278. Dole Food Company is the largest farm employer in California, with approximately 28,000 people working for the firm over the course of any single year.

Perhaps the most stunning UFW victory occurred at the E & J Gallo Winery vineyards in Sonoma County. After nearly a year of quiet house meetings, the Gallo employees voted overwhelmingly to have the UFW represent them

in contract negotiations. Given the two parties' history, it was an especially impressive win: Veteran UFW activists can still recall the bitter strike and subsequent lockout at the main Gallo facility near the small San Joaquin Valley town of Livingston during the 1970s.

Of potential long-term significance, the UFW signed new contracts with two additional farms, and renegotiated existing contracts at eleven others. The UFW says it is involved in active negotiations with dozens of farm employers.

Several large-scale farm worker marches held in key agricultural areas throughout the state this summer signaled the UFW's renewed commitment to organizing workers. Two events in April, one in Salinas, and the other in Greenfield, attracted 800 and 600 marchers respectively. A May march and *tardeada* (union celebration) in the Coachella Valley was attended by 1,500 grape workers, followed in June and July by a march and *tardeada* in Delano involving more than 1,000 table grape pickers.

The ALRB has responded to renewed UFW activity by issuing fourteen complaints against various employers for improper anti-union actions; most involve charges that workers were fired for their union activities. ♦

### ALRB-CONDUCTED UNION REPRESENTATION ELECTIONS

COMPANY	LOCATION	CROPS	DATE	UFW VOTES	"NO" VOTES	PEAK # OF JOBS
Cal Redi Date Co.	Coachella	dates	6-10-94	25	9	45
Theodore Jay Fish Co.	Coachella	dates	6-30-94	6	0	7
Oceanview Produce Co.	Oxnard	strawberries	5-18-94	298	278	650
Lewis Farms	Traver	fruit	7-19-94	80	9	128
Warmerdam	Hanford	tree fruit, nuts	6-23-94	220	43	340
Gallo	Santa Rosa	wine grapes	7-26-94	81	21	120
Artel	Watsonville	mushrooms	9-02-94	30	4	50

Source: The UFW, courtesy of Philip Martin.