

STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE
360 NELSON STREET S.W.
ATLANTA, GEORGIA
30313

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 16, 1965

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
816 STATE STREET
MADISON, WISCONSIN 53706

SNCC ORGANIZES MIGRANT FARM
WORKERS IN MARYLAND

DENTON, MD. - The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee(SNCC), which has been organizing migrant farm workers in this area since May, will step up its efforts this week amid threats of violence from white farmers. This Sunday workers will hold a mass meeting to launch the beginning of a strike.

SNCC field secretary John Battiste says the workers, mainly Florida Negroes and Puerto Ricans, average about \$.75 to \$.80 an hour at piece work. "They want to be paid time and a half for overtime, decent housing, some minimal kind of health benefits and recreation facilities where their kids can go during the day." He added that things are as bad here as in Mississippi's Delta where over 2000 Negro cotton choppers and pickers have been on strike since last May.

Besides picking crops such as tomatoes, cucumbers, strawberries and beans, the migrants work at poultry and canning factories in the area. The work season lasts for about five months. A 1963 survey by college students and SNCC workers showed that about 30% of the work force was unemployed. "One of the big problems is that there is so much unemployment that we fear people may jump at the chance to take over the jobs of the strikers," Battiste said.

Farmers in the area have been trying to chase the SNCC organizers from the district for weeks and some arrests by police are feared at this Sunday's mass meeting. SNCC hopes to build up a strike fund including food, clothing and money.

This is the first attempt at organizing migrant workers on the Eastern seaboard since the 1930's. SNCC members spoke with unemployed workers, ministers, schoolteachers and others for weeks this spring before they decided to organize in and around Caroline county.

farm
68-1510