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SUGAR BEETS HAVE BEEN THE WAY
OUT FOR THOUSANDS OF JAPANESE EVACUEES

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More than seven thousand Japanese from the west's War Relocation Centers volunteered during the past year to work in the sugar beet fields of the nation, thereby assisting materially in the production of an essential weapon of war . . . quick energy food.

To a large percentage of these recruits the experience was a new one. Many of them were mere youngsters; some were city bred Japanese who had come from fine homes on the Pacific Coast but had been forced into reception centers, then relocation centers by the circumstances of war. Some were women and girls who responded to agriculture's call "man power" by joining the army of harvesters.

While the number of recruits was small compared to the needs of the industry and compared also with the potential number that might have responded, the beet growers who were fortunate enough to receive their quota of these workers greatly appreciate the help that was given.

Recruiting of Japanese laborers from relocation centers followed a plan approved by the War Relocation Authority. For every evacuee taking outside employment there was a specific offer of employment from an individual farmer. This offer specified housing accommodations, the terms of employment, and other details. The wage scale prevailing in the region for this type of work to be done was also guaranteed under the regulations.

Recruiting of evacuees was done largely by the sugar company, and at its own expense, in behalf of the beet grower . . . and the job cost a war chest of money . . . and a lot of man power besides.

Best recruiting results were obtained from the temporary reception centers, before the removal of evacuees to their permanent relocation bases, although many were recruited from the relocation centers themselves.

The industry had a wide variety of results from its recruiting efforts. From the Eden camp in Idaho, for example, nearly two thousand Japanese were recruited from a total population of eight thousand. From Topaz, Utah, on the other hand, with approximately the same population, barely one-tenth that number were recruited. From Tule-lake, in Northern California, with fifteen thousand inhabitants, only eight hundred volunteered for outside farm work, though this camp's own agricultural project utilized many additional men and boys. These differences are also partly accounted for by the fact that the Topaz and Tule-lake camps had higher percentages of evacuees without previous agricultural experience.

The Amalgamated Sugar Company was among the very first to ask the Government's permission to recruit Japanese evacuee labor for the harvesting of agricultural crops. The first of these recruits came out of the Portland reception center last spring for work in Eastern Oregon.

Because of uncertainty as to the attitude of communities toward the evacuees and the fear of unpleasant incidents, local and state officials were at first reluctant to support the program. But as the need for help became acute and the attitude of the evacuees and local communities became mutually adjusted to the situation, acceptance of the Japanese has become general throughout Amalgamated territory.

The employing farmer has shown uniform consideration for the evacuee worker, as attested by the voluntary praise for "the boss" expressed by many a well-trusted Japanese employee. Almost invariably the conditions of employment were lived up to by both parties to the contract, and short terms of service were expanded into longer ones; sometimes into permanent jobs.

Howard Imazeki, writing in Daily Tulelake Dispatch, published by the evacuees in the Tulelake camp, says:

"The majority of the white farmers are astonishingly good to the evacuee workers. I have yet to hear any serious complaints against them. They don't seem to take advantage of the workers' plight . . . They are friendly and have a knack of learning the first names of their workers. Most of them come to the camp in the morning and pick up their boys and bring them back in the evening. A lot of them lend their own passenger cars to the Japanese crew hands to transport workers. Several beautiful cars are seen parked along the camp road nightly."

Many evacuees who accepted "trial contracts" of thirty days, or more, later sent for their families to join them for the duration, or plan to return to the same communities with their families next spring.

The job of thinning, cultivating, and harvesting the largest crop of sugar beets in the nation's history has not been an easy one for either the grower or the processor. Sometimes the job seemed almost impossible. Some beets were lost, though the percentage of loss, on the whole, was extremely small. Neither was the job an easy one for the inexperienced Japanese farm worker. And not enough Japanese volunteered to replace the regular farm workers who have left the farm for military service or to earn higher wages in defense industries.

In 1943 the nation faces another shortage of sugar . . . a shortage that is likely to become more critical than the present one. So the beet sugar industry must again stretch itself to produce a bumper crop . . . bigger, we hope, than the crop of 1942. To do this we must get even more help than last year from the Government through draft deferment of farm workers, cooperation of students, white-collar workers, women,

and over-aged workers from neighboring communities. Besides, we must have even more help from the Japanese evacuees than he has given this year . . . much more!

Here is an opportunity for every Japanese, alien or citizen, to show his loyalty to America.

The challenge is now laid down to all able-bodied Japanese who love to breathe free air and earn their own living. The sugar beet industry has done more than all other private agencies combined to provide work for evacuees, opening to thousands of them the door of opportunity to get out and look around for work of their own choosing, as well as to perform patriotic service on the food-production front. Meanwhile many of these beet workers have accumulated hundreds of dollars as a nest egg for the earliest possible resumption of educational or industrial activities on a normal pre-war basis.

But even more important than all this, work on the far front is one of the best possible ways for evacuees to rebuild goodwill with the American public which was so unfortunately lost for them at Pearl Harbor, no matter how unjust such a judgment may seem to countless loyal Americans of Japanese ancestry, who love our free institutions and our democratic way of life as dearly as any native citizen of any race. It is more than flag-waving, more than economic expediency which moves us to say that only through "all-out" service on the production front can Japanese hope to re-establish themselves in peace and prosperity, in the full confidence of the American public, for the duration of the war and for the more pleasant years to follow.

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