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PLANNING

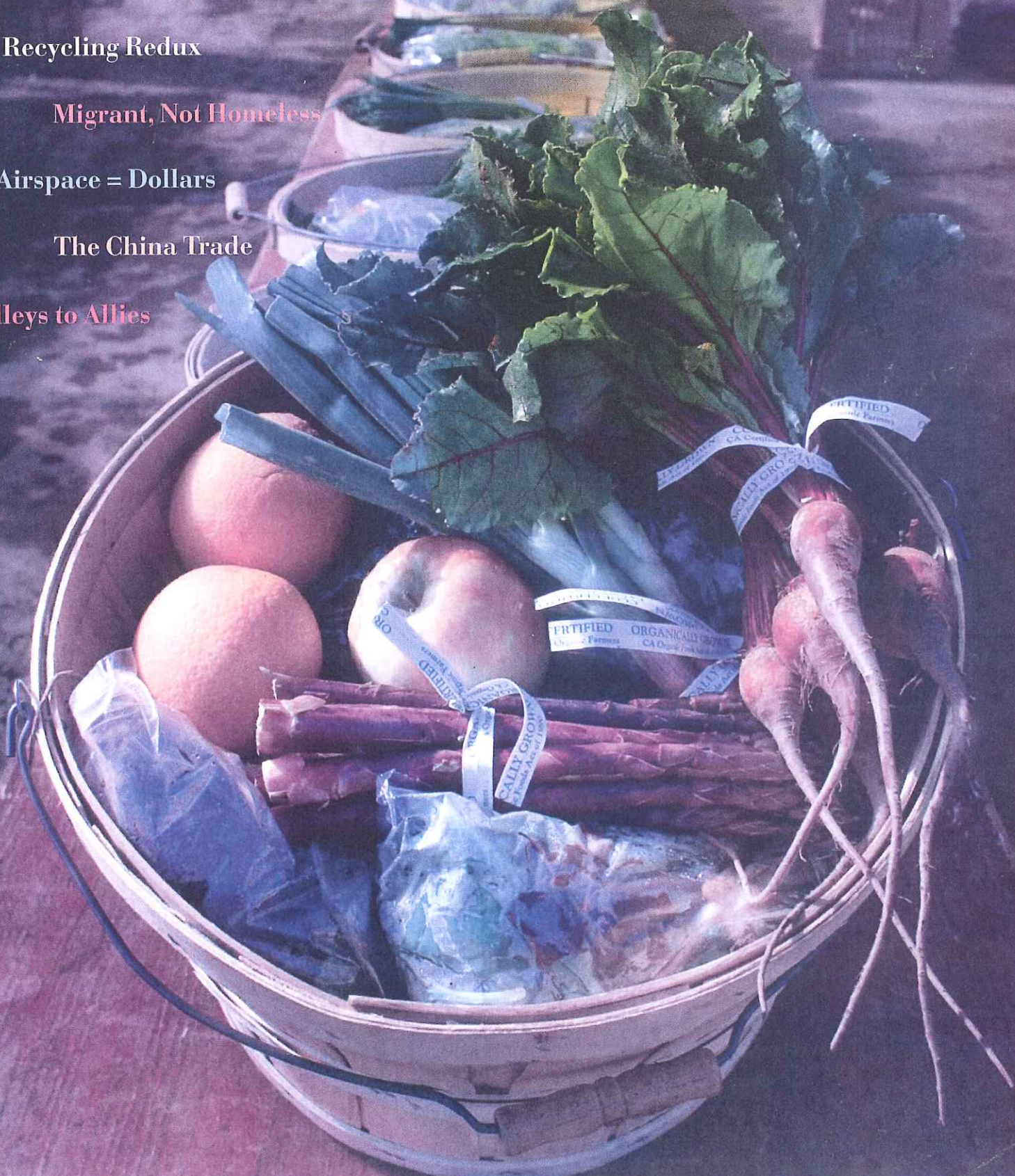
Recycling Redux

Migrant, Not Homeless

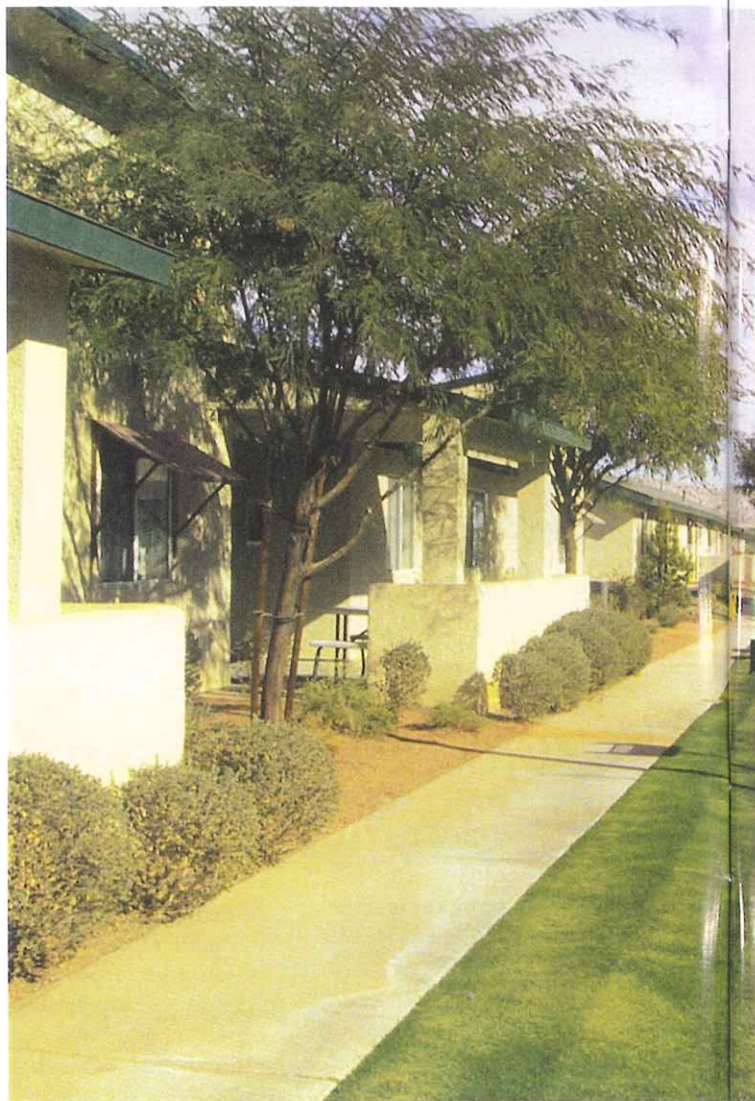
Airspace = Dollars

The China Trade

Alleys to Allies



Jesus Ortiz
spent his first
season as a
migrant
farmworker in
California
sharing a
roughly 10- by-
10 foot room
with his father
and nine other
men.



This year, the 19-year-old shared a comparable room with just his father. The difference: The two men arrived early enough in the harvest season to grab a pair of beds in a small housing project. That project was developed for migrants by the Coachella Valley Housing Coalition and the Riverside County Economic Development Authority.

The Ortizes were lucky. Las Mañanitas can house 128 men in 16 units. The vast majority of the 15,000 migrants who arrive in this southern California desert valley for the annual table-grape harvest must fend for themselves. Some crowd into rented garages, apartments, trailers, and motel rooms. Others camp in parks, parking lots, and by irrigation canals, living in what

a federal Housing and Urban Development official calls Third World conditions.

This situation is not unique to the Coachella Valley. More than half of all farmworkers in the country migrate to find work, and most have a hard time finding decent housing, says Moises Loza, executive director of the Housing Assistance Council, a Washington, D.C., nonprofit organization that helps rural organizations develop affordable housing.

"The only difference between the people you see in Mecca [a Coachella Valley village] and the homeless in Los Angeles or San Francisco is that people in Mecca have jobs," says Jeff Hays, director of the Desert Alliance for Community Empowerment in Coachella. "About 40 percent of the migrants in this area

you see in vacant lots or garages or clustered together in the trees by canals. The worst off are camping in trees, in boxes, down in Mecca."

Throughout the country, demand for farmworker housing far outpaces supply and funds are desperately short.

A very tough job

Developing affordable housing is difficult in rural areas where density and noise are anathema, infrastructure is underdeveloped, politics are conservative, and local prejudices may center on farmworkers. And there is little economic incentive to build migrant housing. Migrants can pay very little rent, and they move with the seasons.

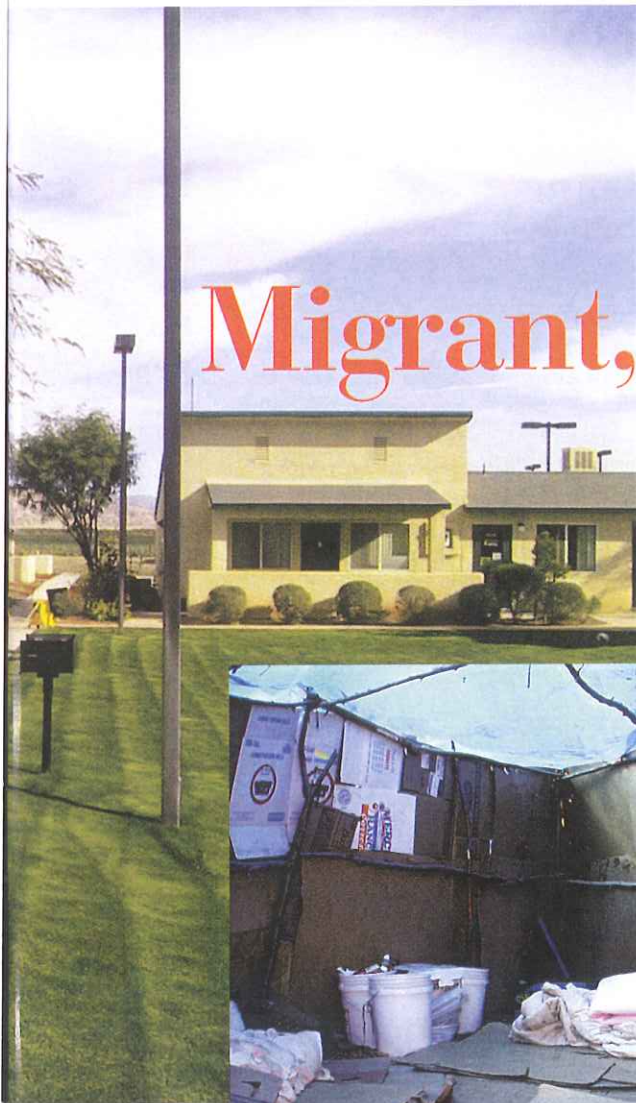
"Nobody can build housing for people mak-

Coachella Valley Housing Coalition

Migrant, Not Homeless

By James B. Goodno

More than 10 migrant workers lived in this cardboard and tarp shanty in Washington State. Others are luckier. Opposite: Las Mañanitas, a new development in Riverside County, California.



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ing \$5 or \$6 per hour who don't work 12 months a year," says John Mealey, executive director of the Coachella Valley Housing Coalition. "We'll never solve the problem unless ag pays more or the federal government and state governments come in and take a big swing at the problem."

Many farmworkers are illegal immigrants, and that complicates matters. USDA-RD requires housing providers to check the immigration status of tenants. "Many migrant workers are illegal, so right off the bat it's hard to use federal money," says Heriberto Rosales, a grant and program specialist with the Rural Community Assistance Corporation, which provides technical assistance and financial support to rural affordable housing providers in 12 Western states. "I haven't heard a story of a

successful use of federal funds to house migrant workers considered illegal."

Also, state enforcement of housing standards is a double-edged sword, attacking the hideous conditions often found in farm labor camps but leading many growers to stop providing housing to migrant workers.

"Growers have a very strong interest in finding and securing farmworker housing," says Jasper Hempel, executive vice-president and general counsel for the Western Growers Association, a farmers group in California. "The principal barrier is California's ultra-stringent farmworker housing law. For example, you have to have a window in the bathroom. Even a hotel wouldn't meet that requirement."

The Housing Assistance Council reports that more than half of migrant housing units

are crowded; nearly a quarter have serious structural problems; 17 percent of the units are "severely substandard" and 16 percent "moderately substandard." Farmworkers' median household income is \$860 per month.

The worst housing in America?

The U.S. Department of Labor stopped calculating the number of farmworkers in the country after reporting a population of 1.6 million in 1995. Roughly 77 percent of that population was born in Mexico and another four percent in other foreign countries.

According to the department, migrants make up roughly 56 percent of the agricultural workforce, but breaking down the population into migrants and home-based workers isn't easy. Many farmworkers are seasonally employed even when they work close to home. These workers often migrate for one or two months a year, leaving families behind.

Most migrants follow one of three main migrant routes. The most popular brings workers from the Southwest and Mexico up through California, Oregon, and Washington. The central stream flows from Texas and Mexico into Rocky Mountain States and the Midwest. The eastern trail starts in Florida and the Caribbean and winds up in New England and upstate New York. Migrants are most often found in seasonal, labor-intensive crops: fruits and row crops. Seasons can vary from a few weeks to six months or longer.

Farmworkers are poor. "In 1999, the median personal income of a farmworker was between \$5,000 and \$7,500, unchanged since 1988," states a study by Rural Opportunities Inc. in New York. "Farmworkers are becoming poorer because their incomes are stagnant in the face of slowly but steadily rising prices."

Agricultural employees also contend with

"the worst housing conditions of any population in the country," says John Henneberger, co-director of the Texas Low-Income Housing Information Service, a statewide advocacy group. "We happened to visit a grower run development outside the city of Muleshoe. It was in the upper 90s. The development hadn't had water for 24 hours. Twenty units of migrant housing were occupied. Residents had to use communal bathrooms and there was no potable water."

Florida provides a snapshot of the housing shortage. "Statewide demand for farmworker housing consists of 96,085 farmworker households with 176,348 household members," says the Florida Housing Finance Corporation. State-licensed labor camps and publicly financed farmworker housing can accommodate 59,330 farmworkers and their family members.

Unaccompanied males are often the hardest to house. Many end up living in camps on growers' land or in overcrowded apartments or trailers. "Relatively few federally subsidized housing units are available for single-male farmworkers," according to a 2002 University of Florida paper prepared for the Miami-Dade Planning and Zoning Department.

With old-fashioned grower-provided camp housing in decline and only a few states investing in farmworker housing, the federal government is frequently the funding source of choice. HUD provides support through Community Development Block Grants, the Rural Housing and Economic Development initiative, and other programs that channel money and expertise through local governments, redevelopment agencies, and housing authorities. It also supports the Housing Assistance Council's Self-Help Homeownership Program and is helping to build regional and national networks of farmworker housing providers and advocates.

USDA-RD has provided grants and loans for about 860 developments with 14,000 units since 1968. The agency funds development and rehabilitation and offers rent subsidies. In FY 2003, USDA-RD offered \$37.4 million in loans and \$18 million in grant funds for construction of farmworker housing through its section 514 loan and section 516 grant programs. The proposed FY 2004 budget includes \$42 million in loans and \$17 million in grants.

"Property owners have to jump through a lot of hoops to work with our program," says Art Garcia, housing services administrator for USDA-RD. Staff in USDA-RD's 1,000 state and county offices monitor programs, make sure quality considerations are met, permits are secured, and inspections are conducted.

With more than 400 units, Everglades Villages in Homestead, Florida, is one of the largest farmworker housing projects in the U.S.



Photograph: Smith Aerial Photos

Two housing developments in Washington State that were built for farmworkers: Heritage Glen in East Wenatchee (for families with 50 percent of the area's median income) and Raspberry Ridge in Burlington (for those with 35 percent).



Office of Rural & Farmworker Housing

"Our staff is there on a daily basis, watching the hammering of the nails," Garcia says. He praises the developers USDA-RD relies on to build farmworker housing, saying their work is beautiful. "There's a certain quality; they're built to last," he says.

Down in the valley

Coachella Valley is located in the heart of the Mojave Desert, where summer temperatures reach well into triple digits and rain is rare. Yet farmers have prospered growing dates and table grapes. Growers employ seasonal workers—local people who work as many as 10 months of the year in the fields—and migrants who work the April to August peak seasons.

"We have two different groups—people who live here and single males, maybe traveling in a group, passing through—with two different housing needs," observes John Thurman, principal development specialist with the Riverside County Economic Development Authority. "There is an extreme shortage of both types of housing."

Las Mañanitas "fills up right away," according to John Mealey. "We have to turn away up to 200 people a day during the high season."

Tenants at Las Mañanitas pay \$25 a week for a bed. They're required to abide by a strict set of rules, including a ban on alcohol and restrictions on noise. The rules are popular with residents. "Where I stayed before, people would just drink all day," says Jesus Ortiz. "I couldn't sleep. I feel more secure, more safe here."

The first phase of Las Mañanitas was completed in 1999. Built on 10 acres owned by EDA and leased at no cost to the Coachella Valley Housing Coalition, Las Mañanitas I contains 11 multi-tenant units with a total of 88 beds, a manager's unit and office, laundry facility, and common areas and outdoor cooking areas. Each furnished unit contains four two-person bedrooms built around a living room, dining room, and kitchen. Las Mañanitas II was completed in December 2002. It consists of 40 beds in five similar multi-tenant units and was financed by the county and HUD.

Proper financing was critical to the project's success. "The key was to keep debt service down," says Marvin Contreras, a financial officer with the coalition. "That's how we can afford to charge residents \$25 a week. This project has zero debt service." County funds and rent cover operating expenses, which include the property management fees, salaries, office expenses, water and sewer costs, utilities, and insurance.

Keeping a lid on costs

The Desert Alliance for Community Empow-

erment (DACE) is developing migrant housing in the nearby village of Oasis. By using polished concrete floors, pre-fabricated panelized housing, and other modest building techniques, DACE hopes to keep costs down to \$20,000 or less per bed. That's more than a mobile home would cost, but less than what was spent on Las Mañanitas. "It's a homeless shelter," says Jeff Hays. "We can't have debt."

EDA's ownership of Las Mañanitas meant the development could pass through a streamlined permitting process. "We have a little flexibility," says Thurman. "We don't have to go through variances, conditional-use permits, and zoning requirements."

"The county zoning ordinance doesn't apply to government property," confirms Paul Clark, a Riverside County planner. "Most of the land is in the ag area, which allows for agricultural labor camps, farm buildings, barracks, or migrant agricultural worker mobile homes. Zoning allows these uses so long as they

"If you're going to do a project like this, start with the politicians. Get the county supervisor to buy in and develop relations with the department heads."

get a conditional-use permit or a plot permit."

Projects the size of Las Mañanitas typically require a public hearing, environmental impact studies, and a more extensive review on the way to a conditional-use permit. DACE's project will require a conditional-use permit, and Hays says the county planning department has "helped substantially on the technical side, saying here's what we need, playing a proactive role."

Innovation and opposition

In the Coachella Valley, housing developers have worked hard to win support for farmworker housing. Clark says elitist opposition to farmworker housing wouldn't be

popular in the current climate, but this isn't always the case.

"We ask people to come to pick crops that are worth millions of dollars, but we don't want them to live in our backyard, we don't want them in our schools; we want them just to come and go," says one HUD housing specialist.

Sister Lorraine Lauter, director of Migrant/Immigrant Shelter and Support (M/ISS) in Owensboro, Kentucky, has confronted these problems while developing a hostel for migrant workers. "Looking for land, we met a lot of opposition simply because nobody wanted it next door," says Lauter. "I had people call me and say, 'Sister, do you know what NIMBY means?'"

M/ISS confronted opposition by working to integrate farmworkers into the community, recruiting long-term residents, including local growers, to M/ISS's board, and running programs to orient migrants and new arrivals to the local community. "We never talk about the Hispanic community; we talk about newest members of our community," Lauter says.

Ultimately, M/ISS secured the conditional-use permit needed to develop its hostel, but other housing developers face similar challenges, and many are struggling to come up with innovative solutions. Brien Thane, director of the Office of Rural and Farmworker Housing, a nonprofit in Yakima, Washington, has jumped both financial and planning hurdles. Two years ago, his group developed a 35-unit property that included 18 migrant units. The year-round rentals help cover operating costs, partly subsidizing the migrant units.

"We go to extreme lengths to make sure we get appropriately zoned land," Thane says. "We sometimes need conditional-use permits for community space; sometimes we need to apply for a planned unit development permit to get a better site plan. Usually we try to come in and find a property where we can develop as is."

This strategy has worked elsewhere, too. "We try to design town homes that fit with the zoning," says Howard Porter, executive director of the Alliance for Better Housing in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. "Unfortunately, there are very few zoning districts or available land that allow multi-family housing or town homes."

"We're looking at purchasing hotels and motels," says John Schmidt, executive director of the New Jersey office of Rural Opportunities, Inc. "That way we don't have to ask for zoning variances. We can rent by the week or by the month; it would almost be like going into the hotel business. It's a commercial venture, which could be financed with a straight mortgage."

Older motels, built before the Interstate

system, can be bought inexpensively in many parts of the country, but not in California's Sonoma Valley, a wine-growing region popular with tourists. There, the nonprofit Vineyard Workers Service (VWS) has turned to modular housing as a partial solution to its housing problems.

Last year, VWS received a California Endowment grant through the Rural Community Assistance Corporation for a pilot program linking migrant housing to healthcare. To conform with state and local laws, VWS contracted with a company in neighboring Napa County to build modular units that could be removed from the site (land donated by a local grower) during the off season.

To build on agricultural land, VWS needed building permits, septic permits, temporary power permits, and foundation, plumbing, and fire inspections. The county had to grant an exemption to its prohibition on septic systems. Through contacts with politicians and department heads, Ferris negotiated reduced fees and waivers.

"If you're going to do a project like this, start with the politicians," he says. "Get the county supervisor to buy in and develop relations with the department heads. They understand the spirit of the law."

Sunbelt living

Converted motels, portable modular units, and the trailer homes that are used in many places offer a partial solution to short-term housing needs, particularly in northern areas with short growing and harvest seasons. In other places, attention is being directed to efforts that link migrant housing to long-term housing and community development. After all, farmworkers, including migrants, want more than a bed to sleep in.

"Proximity to shopping and schools, not wanting to travel 30 miles to a grocery store is important to farmworkers," notes Marcus Hepburn, a housing specialist with Florida's Department of Community Affairs.

"We've had a big success in farm-labor housing in Anthony, New Mexico," says USDA's Art Garcia. Located between El Paso and Las Cruces, Anthony produces pecans, onions, and chili, but most farmworkers work at local dairies. They often move up from farmworker housing to adjacent multifamily housing, Garcia says. There is also "self-help" housing, which allows households to build up credit toward a down payment through sweat equity earned by working on their own and neighbors' homes.

The Everglades Community Association

(ECA) also offers multi-purpose housing and an array of community services on property it controls in Homestead, Florida. Established in 1982 by farm-labor advocates and growers who had been fighting over control of a county-operated farmworker trailer park, the association became heavily involved in development after Hurricane Andrew wiped out 398 of 400 mobile homes in 1992.

Built with a mix of funds from the USDA, the Federal Home Loan Bank, HUD, and the Florida Home Finance Corporation, housing at ECA serves both migrant and home-based populations. "Everglades Village is a much larger planned community than you would find in a typical tax-abatement project or USDA-funded project," says Steve Kirk, ECA's executive director. "Our planning process was to build more of a self-contained community. When we first planned the village in 1993, we were remote; we needed to include essential services in a master plan."

Everglades Village currently has 2,250 residents living in 443 units, and additional units are planned. Its town center includes a leasing office, a 6,000-square-foot community center, a social service center, 10,000 square feet in rentable space, and land set aside for educa-

"We wanted flexible design, So we came up with quadplexes."

tion and parks. Retail space will eventually contain a grocery, credit union, computer lab, cafe, and social services. A park was created that is shared with the county, and a parcel has been set aside for a health center.

In response to tenant requests, the project is gated between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m., and security patrols roam the village at night. "I didn't like this from a planning perspective, but people wanted it," says Kirk. "We also have some traditional neighborhood elements. You need a car to go to work, but basic things can be done on site. We have postal boxes in the neighborhood service center, which brings people to the community center on a daily basis."

The village has curbs, gutters, sidewalks, and other details that were not required by law. Although private, the roads and streets were built to local standards. Homes were built

close to sidewalks and have front and rear porches. Front yard parking was allowed so residents could keep an eye on their cars. Casa Cesar Chavez, the planned migrant housing, will contain four town houses with seven two- and four-bedroom units. The units will be built later this year (to replace existing trailers) around an enclosed outdoor common space that will be accessed via a key card.

ECA has incorporated some of these design elements into smaller migrant housing projects it's putting up in other parts of Florida. One of these, in Ruskin, will contain 128 beds and is one of three backed by a pilot USDA-funded program.

Hepburn says the project is being developed to house adults traveling alone, but what if demand shifts to family housing? "We wanted flexible design," says Hepburn. "So we came up with quadplexes. The dominant population now will be single adults, but the units can also accommodate families. They're adaptable to possible changes in the population."

Housing grows in wine country

Florida is one of a handful of states whose state government is actively providing farmworker housing or financing. Washington State has given priority to farmworker housing for about five years, increasing funding for agricultural housing and creating a new state-level operating and maintenance fund to help support migrant housing and other special-needs housing. That fund is financed by a \$10 surcharge on documents recorded with county assessors.

California operates a pair of programs aimed at housing farmworkers. The Office of Migrant Affairs has built and supports 21 migrant centers throughout the state. These shelter migrant families for up to six months and frequently provide additional services like healthcare or childcare. Most of the centers have been rehabilitated in recent years or are scheduled for rehabilitation, and most are full.

California's other state program, the Joe Serna Farmworker Housing Program, supports farmworker housing development. These programs received a boost in 2000, when the legislature appropriated \$55 million for farmworker housing, and again in 2002, when voters approved Proposition 46, an affordable housing bond measure that included an additional \$22 million for farmworker housing.

"This was a huge shot in the arm," says Matthew O. Franklin, director of the state's Housing and Community Development department. Serna funds are being used to develop housing for unaccompanied migrants, but many of the priorities are being set at the



Photo courtesy Napa Valley Vintners Association

Napa Valley wine growers agreed to a special tax in order to fund the \$3.4 million River Ranch Farmworker Center, which opened in May. The 60-bed facility was built with reinforced earth that came from the cave tailings generated by wineries in Napa County.



Resources

On the web

Housing Assistance Council: www.ruralhome.org • U.S. Department of Agriculture-Rural Development: www.rurdev.usda.gov • Rural Community Assistance Corporation: www.rcac.org • Rural Opportunities: www.ruralinc.org • California Department of Housing and Community Development: www.hcd.ca.gov • Coachella Valley Housing Coalition: www.cvhc.org • Florida Housing Finance Corporation: www.floridahousing.org • Office of Rural and Farmworker Housing: www.orfh.org

local level.

Napa County recently used \$1.5 million in Joe Serna funds to develop housing for migrant workers in the wine industry. Napa, the country's premier wine-producing region, is one of the most successful agrarian economies in the U.S. It's also home to some of the most expensive real estate on the planet. Increasingly, grape growers rely on a permanent workforce, but migrants continue to pour into the valley during the growing and harvest seasons, and the county estimates it will need 300 more beds for migrants over the next five years.

For several years, donations from the Napa Valley Wine Auction and a voluntary assess-

ment imposed on growers helped fund camps operated by the Napa Valley Housing Authority, but more work was needed.

"In 1999, there was a crisis at the Calistoga camp," says Tom Shelton, CEO of Joseph Phelps Vineyards. "They had 40 guys sleeping in tents with nowhere to go." Responding to the crisis, the Napa Valley Vintners Association pledged to support a mandatory assessment on vineyards and to seek volunteers to donate land.

Three things quickly happened: Joseph Phelps offered 10 acres of his River Ranch land for migrant housing; landowners approved a \$10 per acre assessment on vineyards to support migrant housing; and voters amended the county general plan, allowing the subdivision of agricultural preserve land for migrant housing.

The assessment (which housing authority director Peter Dreier says will generate \$380,000 this year) will be used to operate county-run migrant housing. It freed Napa Valley Wine Auction funds that were previously used to offset the operating deficit to help build new facilities for migrants and affordable housing in the cities as well. Already, the association has redirected \$677,000 from the Napa Valley Wine Auction to construction costs at River Ranch, which supplemented the state money and \$1.2 million from the county housing trust fund.

Construction of the 60-bed River Ranch project has already been completed, and the facility is occupied. Built of rammed earth by specialist builder David Easton and designed by Don Brandenburger, an architect with wine country experience, the facility is "very efficient and fits with the surroundings," says Shelton.

Vintners and the county are now looking at potential sites for the county's next migrant center. "Realistically, our progress depends on the availability of developable land," Dreier says. "Going through the design approval process could take three to six years, but we're optimistic."

Napa is more affluent and liberal than many rural communities, and it's in a state that provides resources for migrant housing. Its experience is unlikely to be duplicated in many places. Still, it provides an example of what can be done when resources are pooled and the community committed.

Goodno writes about planning and social justice. His father was a farmworker in Connecticut's tobacco fields as a child.