

Miami Herald

MIGRANT CAMP ASSOCIATION GIVEN LEASE BY THE COUNTY

CASEY FRANK Herald Staff Writer
October 6, 1983

Everglades Community Association, the nonprofit corporation that rescued Everglades Migrant-Labor Camp from the auction block, finally has a county lease to show for it. The Metro Commission unanimously approved a lease Thursday giving the association full authority to govern the migrant-labor camp at 19400 SW 376th St.

"If anybody is glad today in Dade County, it's me," said Cipriano Garza, chairman of the board of directors. "The camp is open and operating in a most satisfactory manner." Under the \$1-per-year lease agreement, the association must make quarterly debt service payments of \$58,834 on 200 trailers bought in 1980 with a federal loan. The lease runs retroactively from Dec. 1, 1982, to Nov. 30, 1984.

A year-and-a-half ago, cost-cutting Metro commissioners voted to stop subsidizing the labor camp with county tax dollars. County officials threatened to close the camp and auction off the trailers unless a community group came forward with a management strategy that wouldn't require tax dollars. After months of difficult haggling, the Everglades Community Association, a coalition of growers, migrants and interested citizens, finally agreed to operate the camp. The county subsidy ended Nov. 30. The association has been in charge of the camp ever since, although it hasn't had a formal lease. It has made three quarterly debt-service payments on schedule.

Despite losing the county subsidy, the camp has been able to maintain weekly rents at \$48 for two bedroom trailers, \$50 for three-bedroom units, the same as before the takeover. The association has hired a new director, Enrique Vasquez, "streamlined" administrative procedures, tightened the camp's eviction policies and started a crime watch program, according to Garza. He said the policies have paid off handsomely over the past 10 months. "I would say that 92-95 per cent of the people have been current with the rent. The county was lucky to have 50 per cent current," Garza said.