

## **Los Angeles Times**

### **Migrant Workers' Lives Are Uprooted by Storm : Florida: The hurricane has destroyed their homes and wiped away the fields where they make their living.**

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FLORIDA CITY, Fla. — Usually Robert Torres would be in the fields now, preparing the flat, marly ground for young tomato plants set in rows that run straight into the horizon. But not this year. Not after Hurricane Andrew. "Sometimes it's hard to believe all this," Torres, 35, said Monday. A big man, Torres was sitting in a folding chair under a beach umbrella stuck in the lawn of his brother's wind-racked house in the Everglades Labor Camp, about five miles south of here.

Across the road, in the direction Torres stared, was what looked like a vast garbage dump: sheets of twisted aluminum, broken furniture, plastic bags, clothing, crumpled toys. This is what remains of 400 trailers, including the one Torres lived in with his wife, Diana, and two children. "I think every day--how are we going to do it?" Torres said. "How are we going to start over? Food and water is no problem. We have that. But with no money and no work. . . "

On the eighth day after Hurricane Andrew ripped across southern Florida and changed lives and the landscape forever, many people returned to work Monday. Indeed, some communities were well on their way to recovering from what is being called the most destructive natural disaster in U.S. history. In southern Florida, Hurricane Andrew, which struck here Aug. 24, is blamed for 17 deaths, up to \$30 billion in damage and a legacy of misery that is often untold and uncounted. The devastation is most dominant over a 20-mile-by-30-mile area south of Miami, particularly in the three migrant labor camps in the rich agricultural lands in far south Dade County.

"We have been totally isolated here," said Susan Reyna, an administrator with Centro Campesino, a farm workers' advocacy group that aids migrants with housing, child care and job services. "Now we are just trying to get the word out: Don't come here. There is no work. Usually our season starts in August and September, and people come back. But this year there is nothing."

At a time when the fields here would normally be readied for tomatoes, pole beans and squash, there is virtually no plowing or planting. In dozens of area nurseries, sheds were blown apart, irrigation systems uprooted and miles of young palm trees and ornamental shrubs lie flattened. No one yet knows what Hurricane Andrew will mean to Dade County's \$1-billion agriculture industry.

"We have been hit with storms and freezes before, but nothing like this. This was a wing-dinger," said longtime county Agricultural Extension Service agent Seymour Goldweber. "But we'll be back. Farmers don't quit farming."

Right now, however, the migrant workers, most of them Mexican, know what the storm means to them: more hard times. No relief even arrived at the Everglades camp until Wednesday--three days after winds of 150 m.p.h. raked the area for two hours. Now hundreds of farm workers are counted among the estimated 250,000 left homeless by the storm.