

# From Little House

By Mary Ann McGivern, S.L.



I went to hear Cesar Chavez speak at Webster University last week. A rush of tears filled my eyes in the middle of Virginia Nesmith's introduction. This small man believes so earnestly in justice for farm workers that he touches us all, in all our issues. The United Farm Workers is committed to nonviolence and many of us who struggle now against the military machine learned our nonviolence on picket lines in front of supermarkets and liquor stores. The UFW members include Mexicans, Filipinos, Arabs, Africans, Koreans, Punjabi, and Vietnamese, as well as every kind of hyphenated American plus all the ordinary poor folk. So the Union's opposition to racism, cash cropping, global terror, and the economic structures that crush the poor is rooted in experience.

I owe Cesar a great deal for what his Union has taught me--as well as the food they have provided me. I cannot refuse to boycott grapes once more, not when the UFW asks.

**"The UFW is asking us  
to boycott grapes..."**

The California Labor Relations Act has been in effect since 1975; and while only a minority of farm workers are represented by collective bargaining, wages and working conditions for farmworkers have improved throughout the state. However, since his election in 1982, California governor George Deukmejian has systematically cut the Labor Relation Board budget, withheld settlements to workers, fired the enforcement staff, and delayed hearings. On Deukmejian's first day as governor there were less than 100 farm labor cases pending in California. Today there are more than 1200.

**"The life expectancy of a farm  
worker is still 49 years..."**

The United Farm Workers is asking us to boycott grapes to put pressure on the growers. Then they will put pressure on the governor to enforce the law. (The growers gave over a million dollars to the Deukmejian campaign. So he will probably listen if they ask him to reverse his farm-labor policies).

The life expectancy of a farm worker is still 49 years--here in the United States. Malnutrition is ten times the national rate. Infant mortality is 300% higher than the U.S. average. Eight hundred thousand children work in the fields in our country. We pay more to store our excess than we pay the workers.

What to boycott? TABLE GRAPES. Some of the early California grapes are picked under labor contract, but the Union tracks where they are shipped, and none seem to come to St. Louis. The rest of the California grapes are scab. Don't eat them. (Five year old Matthew Cook was sure they all had scabs on them and couldn't understand why anyone would want to eat them). The winter grapes come from Chile and Cesar reminded us we shouldn't be eating them either.

And don't forget to keep on boycotting Campbell's Soup. Soup is not good food when it's brewed with poor pay and working conditions.

About our own small plot of land, are there any volunteer gardeners out there? The pay is terrible and so far the big harvest is in glass and bricks (both broken); but working conditions are pleasant and there is hope we may make building foundations bloom.



*MARY ANN MCGIVERN cut her sharp organizing teeth on the original UFW grape boycott. Her teeth won't be cutting into anymore grapes for awhile, however. We hope our readers join her in the boycott.*