

# Children Farm Workers Strike Black Co-op

Albany, Georgia — The black eagle flag first flew over the fields of Georgia on August 19th, when 50 Black farm workers, most of them under 16 years of age, walked out on strike at New Communities, Inc., a farming cooperative near here.

As the strike enters its fourth week, only management and eight workers are gathering the harvest at this 6,000 acre farm.

The strikers walked out for a living wage and humane working conditions.

Not only must they work behind machines spraying lethal pesticides, but there is no definite pay scale.

Wages paid by New Communities vary from 67¢-\$1.63 per hour, and management pays each worker whatever they please, according to personal preference.

Strikers say they must put in unnecessary overtime, on a half-hour's notice, at ungodly hours because the farm is poorly managed.

The farm's manager, for instance, would accept a large produce order late in the afternoon and then require people to work late into the night so that the order would be filled the next morning.

Management had convinced the workers that they should not expect better pay or hours be-

cause the entire cooperative was losing money.

Robert Johnson, one of the employees, finally organized the current strike but was promptly fired.

The day after the strike began, the workers called on the United Farm Workers (UFW) field office in Avon Park, Florida for assistance.

Mack Lyons, Florida field office director and UFW National Executive Board member, met with the strikers in Georgia.

The workers signed UFW authorization cards (cards which name the UFW as the bargaining agent of their choice) and voted to demand a UFW contract with the protections of the union's Coca-Cola contract in Florida.

The union has already won back pay for workers who were not earning the minimum wage, sometimes amounting to as much as \$500.

Through several of this Black cooperative's funding organizations are pressuring Charles Sherrod, the farm's manager, to reach a settlement with the strikers, he remains unwilling to negotiate.

With so few scabs left in New Community's fields, the UFW's first strike in the southeast area (outside of Florida) may also bring the first of many UFW contracts to these fields that were once harvested by slave labor.