

PRESIDENT ORDERS MIGRANTS' RELIEF

MAR 16 1971

\$2.5-Million in Disaster Aid
Extended to Jobless After
Crop Failure in Florida

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KEY BISCAYNE, Fla., March 15 — President Nixon extended the concept of disaster relief today to include aid to migrant workers unemployed as a result of crop failures.

Mr. Nixon, winding up a long weekend in Florida and the Bahamas, acted on an appeal from Gov. Reubin Askew for help to thousands of migrant workers made jobless as a result of a freeze and drought that ruined south Florida's commercial tomatoes and other crops.

The President declared the crop failure a major disaster and allocated \$2.5-million for paying unemployment compensation to the migrants. Until now Federal disaster relief had been applied only to calamities like floods, hurricanes and earthquakes.

It had not included Federal financing of unemployment compensation for workers ineligible under state laws. In addition to jobless benefits, the President's declaration of an emergency will permit additional food relief to the migrants under the Federal food stamp plan.

The United States Agriculture Department and private groups have been helping to feed the migrants.

The President acted even

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President Orders Migrants Aid Following Florida Crop Failure

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before the Office of Emergency Preparedness completed a study to determine whether the Federal disaster law applied to freeze and frost emergencies.

The White House explained that Gen. George Lincoln, director of the O.E.P., had recommended that the President act because of the "apparent severity" of the Florida problem.

Compound Picketed

Hundreds of migrants quietly picketed near the Nixon Key Biscayne compound Saturday asking for help. They asked that the President or a civilian aide meet with them and accept a petition they had prepared. The petition said in part:

"We are without work, without hope of work. We have no money for food, for rent, for gas and electricity. We cannot provide for the necessities of life—our children are weak and sick—we don't have enough money to escape these dehumanizing conditions.

"If this country can airlift emergency aid to Pakistan, if this country can provide relief for starving people over 15,000 miles away, surely it can take care of its own people who find themselves, through no fault of their own, in a disaster situation here in Florida."

A Secret Serviceman at a guard house talked with the leaders of the pickets, and the police kept the demonstrators from getting close enough even to see the President's home. Some of the wealthy residents along Bay Front Drive gave milk and cookies to the pickets, who always remained orderly.

Late Saturday the pickets moved from the area of plush

Bay Front homes to Crandon Park, where they camped out for the evening. Yesterday morning they attended a Roman Catholic mass.

Kneeling in prayer they asked "God and President Nixon" for help because "we are desperate." Then they boarded 10 old buses and 15 ancient cars and chugged back to the labor camps.

The migrants estimate that more than 15,000 of them are unemployed in Dade and Collier Counties.

Governor Askew's request for Federal help was presented to Mr. Nixon last Thursday. Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary, said that the President had ordered aides to consider it with "utmost speed."

Meetings were held in Washington over the weekend. Federal officials met with Askew aides today to work out a way to help the migrants.

Mr. Ziegler called the President's action "unprecedented" but emphasized that future applications would have to be made on a "case-by-case" basis.

The White House announcement pointed out that the President had pending in Congress a recommendation that unemployment compensation be extended to agriculture workers.

The legislation, which was bottled up in a conference committee last year, would cover all farms employing eight or more workers for at least 20 weeks. About 400,000 workers would be affected.

Details of administering the emergency south Florida plan have not been worked out. Among the questions to be decided are who will be eligible and the compensation to be paid. Florida's average unemployment compensation payment of \$36.52 a week is one of the lowest in the country.