

**HELP!**

## *Where Do We Get Golf Course Labor?*



by **LEE RECORD**, Agronomist, USGA Green Section

**W**hen a man in his late 40's or early 50's loses his job because of disability or health, the future can seem awfully grim. When a man retires at age 65 after earning a meager salary and has no income other than Social Security, he may be placed on the tense borders of poverty. The man we are speaking of is often the best source of present-day golf course laborers, and even he is hard to find.

We faced a labor shortage on golf courses in 1969, not only in the Mid-continent region, but throughout the United States. To the golf course superintendent, the available-labor situation today is very discouraging because course maintenance has become a skilled and specialized job. Not every individual can adapt himself to the mechanics that revolve around the daily routine of a golf course laborer. Where can you find men who are dependable and willing to work five to seven days a week? Where can you find men who will work from daylight until

late afternoon for relatively low wages with few fringe benefits?

The success of any golf course maintenance program depends to a large extent on the quality of the golf course laborer. During the spring and fall it is common to find three or four men (including the superintendent) trying to maintain an 18-hole golf course. When college and high school students arrive for employment in late May and early June, the maintenance staff is filled. When the students return to school in early September, the superintendent is once again faced with a labor problem. Conditioning of the course during the spring and fall is not up to standards, and it is frequently during this time of the year that important work could be done in preparation for the following summer.

In the greater Chicago area, Spanish-American and Mexican laborers arrive from the Rio Grande Valley of Texas and from Mexico to work from



*Good facilities are as important to a top-notch worker as to anyone else with ability and pride.*

mid-March to December 1st. This is an excellent source of labor for our golf courses. Mexican laborers are seasonal employees who frequently come back year after year. Lodging and in some instances food is provided for them. One superintendent in Chicago reports that four of his returning Mexican employees will be covered

by medical benefits not only while they are in Chicago, but also while they are in Texas for the winter.

We are interested and concerned, along with the golf course superintendents, in the labor shortage problem. What is its cause? What can be done to improve the situation, and what

**Fig. 1**                      **1969 LABOR QUESTIONNAIRE**                      **USGA MID-CONTINENT REGION**

Do you have a:	Yes/No Number	Low/High Salary or hourly wage	(Partial or Full payment by employer) Hospitalization	Retirement Requirements	Xmas Bonus Amount	Living Quarters for Laborers
Foreman or Assistant Superintendent	19 Yes 15 No 1 co-supt. 1 foreman each	\$6,000/\$11,200 average \$9,044 \$3/\$3.75 average \$3.38	6 Full 19 None 11 33%-50%	35 None 1-10 yrs. at age 65	12 Yes 21 None 3 Members contribution \$50-\$500 average \$194	35 None 1 Yes plus meals
Mechanic	23 Yes 10 No 2 part-time 1 foreman-mechanic	\$8,400/\$9,000 average \$8,700 \$2.40/\$4.50 average \$3.45	9 Full 15 None 11 up to 70% 1 begin in Jan.	34 None 1-20 yr @ 65 1-20 yr @ 65	19 Yes 14 None 3 Members contribution \$25-\$500 average \$168	34 None 2 Yes
Permanent laborers	35 Yes 1 No 1-7 men Average 3 men	\$1.75-\$3/\$2.10-\$3.75 Average \$2.46      Average \$2.89	9 Full 10 None 16 33%-50% 1 begin in Jan.	34 None 1-20 yr @ 65 1-20 yr @ 65	25 Yes 7 None 4 Members contribution \$200-\$650 average \$163	31 None 5 Yes 1 with meals 2 1 man only 2 Mexican labor
Seasonal laborers	36 Yes 2-13 men Average 7 men	\$1.40/\$2.50 \$1.90/\$3.50 Average \$1.93      Average \$2.74	1 Full 29 None 5 up to 50% 1 begin in Jan.	36 None	22 None 14 Yes \$20-\$150 average \$162	25 None 1 Pending 10 Yes (Mexican labor)

**Fig. 2**

**FRINGE BENEFITS IN OTHER INDUSTRIES\***

	<b>Food Service</b>	<b>U. S. Industry</b>
Holidays per year	None: 54% One: 11% One to six: 35%	Seven days
Sick leave	None: 69% Seven days per year: 31%	Median: 10 days a year (78% have a plan)
Long term disability	Covered: 26%	Covered: 80%
Life insurance	Covered: 33% (\$2,000 is median amount)	Covered: 99% (\$3,000 is median amount)
Accidental death and disability insurance	Covered: 21%	Covered: 74%
Hospital insurance	Covered: 27%	Covered: 99%
Major medical	Covered: 6%	Covered: 75%
Retirement	Covered: 14%	Covered: almost 100%

\* **Club Management**, September, 1969

additional labor sources may be available?

Last October a labor questionnaire was mailed to 50 private golf courses in the greater Chicago area. The courses selected were those with similar labor problems, needs, and desires for improving existing conditions. The response to the questionnaire was excellent with a return of 70 percent. The results (Fig. 1) we think you will find interesting.

When one compares these figures with those from United States food service and industrial employment sources (Fig. 2), we may find one reason why good, permanent golf course workers are hard to find.

Improved wage scales with added fringe benefits of hospitalization, major medical, retirement, sick leave and vacations strengthens bar-

gaining positions in dealing with and encouraging permanent employment.

Wage improvement and increases in fringe benefits alone, however, are not the sole criteria for the top-notch prospective laborer. The facilities and the equipment he will use also are major factors. Inside lavatory facilities, showers, lockers, etc., are as important to him as they are to anyone else.

Bernie Belknap, Superintendent of Rolling Hills Country Club, Wichita, Kans., faced a labor situation last summer similar to most golf course superintendents in the mid-continent region. His approach to its solution, although not entirely new, is somewhat different, and I asked him for his story:

## *Female Labor*

by **BERNIE BELKNAP**, Golf Course Superintendent, Rolling Hills Country Club, Wichita, Kansas

Female labor is a good source of labor on a golf course!

About three years ago, when our school help went back to classes, we tried for two months to fill out our crew with men. Advertisements were put in the local newspaper and employment agencies were contacted. We found it impossible to hire male help.

Years ago I had worked on a golf course that employed women for its grounds force. I started thinking about this as a possible source of

labor and made two lists of jobs one that women could do, and one with jobs too difficult for them to do. I found more jobs on the course that they **could** do than jobs they **could not**.

I went to the Green Committee and explained my dilemma. It was decided to advertise for female help for the golf course, and we had a number of applications for the job. In talking to the applicants, I was surprised at the number who expressed a preference for outside work. I selected four women whom I felt were quali-