NEWLY LEGAL ALIENS NOW LIVE WITHOUT FEAR, SETTLE INTO JOBS

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Body

COBDEN, Ill. - Illegal ***aliens*** who gained ***legal*** U.S. residency status under theso-called amnesty program have found new opportunity and freedom from ***fear*** of deportation, according to migrant workers in the program. Some migrant workers who have residency documents are beginning to "***settle*** out," quitting the relentless seasonal journeys across the country to stay in one place and enjoy the security of one home, one ***job***, one school for the children. But some people who work with the migrants say that even though fresh opportunities are open, many ***newly*** documented workers will continue traveling in the migrant stream because that's the only ***job*** they know. And some experts say that despite tough new sanctions against employers who hire undocumented workers, the grim economic conditions in Mexico will continue to drive illegal ***aliens*** into this country to try to find work - just to keep from starving. Migrant worker Juan Manual, who has his temporary residency papers, said through an interpreter, "The best thing is you can cross the border freely and just find a ***job***. You can learn the language and get better ***jobs***." ***Legal*** residence means "people feel more secure, they have more choices to get this ***job***, or the other, or the other," said Angie Gomez, a social worker at the Jackson-Union Migrant camp at Cobden. ti G Migrant worker Miguel Carmona, who was staying in Southern Illinois past the close of apple-picking season to pick turnips, said through an interpreter that his residency papers meant he could work freely and not have to hide from immigration officials.

"At least I can sleep better," he added. aieou The amnesty law had two aims: to stem the tide of illegal ***aliens*** across the 1,970-mile border the United States shares with Mexico and to legitimize the illegal ***aliens*** who were already part of the fabric of the U.S. work force. Immigration officials say the program is a success on both counts. To keep new illegal ***aliens*** from entering the country or getting work here, the number of immigration investigators was almost doubled, to 1,500 ***now*** from 800 in 1986. Employers who hire undocumented workers face stiff fines and even jail terms. Because of those tough new enforcement measures, the number of arrests of illegal ***aliens*** crossing the Mexican border into the United States was down to 854,000 in the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30 from 1.6 million in the year that ended Sept. 30, 1986, the year before the amnesty program started, according to Duke Austin of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. Under the amnesty program, 3.1 million illegal ***aliens*** applied for ***legal*** status, which was 2.6 million more than federal officials expected would apply, Austin said. Agricultural workers had to apply for amnesty by Nov. 30, 1988, and other illegal ***aliens*** had to apply by May 4, 1988. Austin said, "We legalized more people in that program than in all other amnesty programs in all other nations combined. It was certainly numerically a success." However, Garth Gillan of Cobden, a deacon with the Catholic Diocese of Belleville who works with the migrants, says he has seen estimates in the Catholic press that more than 50 percent of those eligible did not apply, perhaps because of ***fear***. Bill Garner, the Latin American specialist in the political science department at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, said he also had heard that many who were eligible did not apply because of a "long, long history of bitterness and distrust of the U.S. government by Mexican labor." Sei Austin denies that large numbers of qualified illegal ***aliens*** failed to apply, although he says a few may have failed to apply out of ignorance or "lack of sophistication." -fNdt ba Gomez said for those who did qualify, ***legal*** residency status in the United States means "they don't have to be invisible. Before, if they got hurt while they were working, they wouldn't even say, because they were afraid. ***Now*** at least they can

get medical attention." But for many, "language is still a big barrier" to a better ***life***, Gomez said. Manual is one of the ***newly*** documented workers who is looking for a way past that barrier. Together with his brother, sister, and brother-in-law, he is staying on at the migrant camp past apple-picking season to attend English classes through the Illinois Migrant Council, a non-profit group set up to help the migrants. ad Edgar Tate, a counselor for the Illinois Migrant Council, said he was working with Manual's family in an attempt to help them "***settle*** out" by helping them learn English and find housing and employment. For example, Manual's sister, Tina Alvarez - who has done field work in Texas and fruit-packing work in Cobden - may have a ***job*** in a bakery in Carbondale waiting for her if she masters enough English in the 13-week course she is taking. More migrants are attempting to ***settle*** out by buying "small parcels of land, one or two acres with a trailer," Tate said. Those who ***settle*** out can escape the hot, heavy work involved in migrant labor, as well as the poor housing, long working hours and poor ***living*** and health conditions, Tate said. ah Still, a few migrant workers Tate or other counselors help to ***settle*** out go back to migrant work, which can pay $80 or even more on a good day or as low as minimum wage with a sparse crop. "Sometimes it does happen that they go back to that work, and that's heartbreaking," Tate said. "We say that 'the fields called them,' and sometimes that's just what it is. That's the best thing they know how to do, what they feel most comfortable with." bt But even the migrant stream represents a bright new hope for some who are starving in Mexico. Latin American specialist Garner said Mexican workers fighting for ***jobs*** were grateful to be employed in sweatshop factories along the Mexican border that pay the equivalent of 40 to 60 cents an hour. The nation has suffered from high inflation. For 40 years, 12.5 Mexican pesos equaled one U.S. dollar, but ***now*** the exchange rate is about 2,700 pesos to the dollar, he said. Garner says Mexico's economic woes are the result of the country's $90 billion international debt, its population explosion, and, especially, its leaders who tied the country's welfare solely to oil, which backfired when oil prices plummeted in the early 1980s. Mexicans are ***now*** starving in the streets, Garner said. "I've seen it - it's awful," he said. "I've seen pregnant women begging in front of hotels, and you wonder how they've got the strength to give birth because there's no meat on their bones. I've seen babies walking around with distended bellies, defecating worms. The infant mortality rate is 40 percent in some neighborhoods in Guadalajara." Garner, Gillan, Austin of the INS, Gomez, and the migrant workers themselves all predicted that illegal ***aliens*** would continue to try to slip across the border, despite stronger security. Austin said that for the first time since 1986, when the amnesty program was passed, the rate of illegal ***aliens*** arrested in the last four months of the budget year was higher than during the same period a year earlier. oti INS officials hope new difficulties in finding work in the United States discourage many illegal ***aliens***, even though an industry is springing up to supply fraudulent residency documents. Gomez said workers will "still come ***without*** documents, as long as they can make it, as long as they can cross the water. They're just coming through to survive."

Graphic

Map; MAP: Post-Dispatch Map of Illinois showing site of Cobden

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