

AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION

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Preliminary Information Concerning EMPLOYMENT OF BERRY PICKERS IN THE GRESHAM BERRY DISTRICT*

The tables and charts presented in this brief circular have been tabulated from registration books of the Gresham Berry Growers, Inc., Gresham, Oregon. The purpose was to compile and analyze this information briefly in order to assist in determining the sources of labor, from regions within Oregon and from other states, used in the harvesting of seasonal berry crops in the Gresham district. It was originally planned to use these data in connection with a more comprehensive study of the labor problems in the Gresham area, including family labor supplied locally from the berry growing districts.

For the convenience of the reader, the information is presented in three sections:

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THE GENERAL LABOR PROBLEM OF THE GRESHAM AREA

Berry District

The approximate boundary of the Gresham berry district extends from the eastern city limits of Portland near the Columbia River to a point five miles southeast of Sandy. From there it drops southwest to the Clackamas River, following the north side of the river up to the southern limits of the City of Portland. This encloses an oblong area approximately twenty-five miles long and ten miles wide, covering 250 square miles.

Membership

Figures are not yet available covering all berry growers in this area.** The number of active members of the Gresham Berry Growers, Inc. was 870 during the 1936 berry season. These members have altogether approximately one thousand acres in strawberries, twelve hundred acres in raspberries, and some acreage of other fruits.

*This information was prepared in connection with Project F-48 of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, by C. S. Hoffman, Assistant State Supervisor of Research, under the direction of L. R. Breithaupt, State Supervisor of Rural Research.

**A survey has been recently completed by the Agricultural Agent at Gresham in cooperation with the Bureau of Agricultural Economics covering the number of growers and acreages in the district but these data are not yet available.

The association handles the berry crops of a few non-members. This service is more general for cherries and prunes. Only twelve non-members handled their berries through the association in 1935.

1935 Crop

The total strawberry crop for the 1935 season for all patrons (members plus non-members) was 2,692,110 pounds, and a total raspberry crop of 3,661,949 pounds.

The association handles approximately 80 per cent of the strawberry and raspberry crop from the Gresham district. The returns credited to patrons during 1935 were \$147,327.25 for strawberries and \$231,527.14 for raspberries.

Labor Cost

The approximate labor cost for patrons could be estimated only by figuring the total yield with the price per pound paid for picking. One cent per pound was paid for strawberries with a bonus of one fourth cent to pickers staying until the end of the season. Not all pickers stayed this length of time so the estimate will be somewhat larger than it should be. There was no method of estimating the turnover of pickers in order to arrive at the total number receiving the bonus. With the above method the labor cost for strawberries is shown to be approximately \$60,500.

Two cents per pound was paid for raspberries with a bonus of one-half cent for pickers staying until the season was completed. This would show the total labor cost to be approximately \$91,500 for raspberries.

The number of man-days of labor employed by patrons during the strawberry season was approximately 30,250, and 91,500 during the raspberry season.*

They have found that the "professional pickers" come for only the strawberry crop as a higher average daily wage can be made. These pickers very seldom pick raspberries. Members of the association estimated that in general, pickers earned a higher daily wage picking strawberries than picking raspberries.

Labor Turnover

There was a carry-over of pickers from one crop to the next as in the case of strawberries and raspberries. In 1935 there were thirty-eight registrations for the strawberry crop, representing 95 pickers, who also stayed and picked raspberries after the strawberry crop was finished.

In order to determine to what extent pickers returned from one season to another, and stayed on during the same year, data were compiled from the registration checking individual names.

Of the 1,351 persons picking strawberries in 1935, sixty-five picked raspberries in 1934. Two thousand four hundred twenty-eight persons picked raspberries in 1935 who did not pick them in 1934.

*The average daily earnings made by farm labor in Oregon counties is outlined in Circular of Information No. 151, "Statistical Data Regarding Farm Labor in Oregon," Agricultural Experiment Station, Oregon State Agricultural College.

Only three registrants picked berries during each of the three harvesting periods studied. There was some duplication of registration which would slightly increase the registration total above what it should be. During the 1934 raspberry season 24 registrants appeared twice on the registration books. During the 1935 raspberry season, and during the 1935 strawberry season only 14 duplications in registration occurred.

Total Employment

Members of the association estimated that 7,000 pickers were annually employed during the strawberry and raspberry season and of these about 5,000 were registered and directed to the growers by the employment office of the Gresham Berry Growers. This could be slightly over 70 per cent of all pickers employed by patrons of the association. No figures were available as to the employment of members of the family on the home farms.

The employment office encourages pickers to return each year to the same grower, thereby eliminating the necessity of registering each year. Where employment at the same farm is not available, or the pickers wish to work for someone else, they usually register at the office and are directed to another farm. An unestimated number of pickers who have never registered at the office will go directly to the farm and seek employment. The number of pickers following this procedure is no doubt quite small in proportion to the total employment.

The registration books therefore do not completely cover all pickers employed, but in any event give a fairly accurate sample of the total employment of pickers in this area.

General Registration

1934 Raspberry Season

Registration of pickers for the 1934 raspberry season started on June 3 and continued until July 4, with 853 registrations representing 2,463 pickers. Of these, 183 registrations, representing 529 pickers, came from outside of Oregon, including registrations not ascertainable.

Incomplete Records

Due to incompleteness of the records, caused in many cases by refusal or failure of the registrant to give his legal residence, 121 registrations, representing 341 pickers are listed as "not ascertainable." Many persons coming to the Gresham office to register were under the impression that favoritism was shown to Oregon residents in preference to persons from out-of-state. In several cases it was found that persons registering with an Oregon address, or entering no address at all, were known to be driving automobiles carrying license plates of other states. It is therefore felt that in the majority of cases, pickers registering no address and listed under "not ascertainable" were not residents of Oregon.

1935 Raspberry Season

Registration of pickers for the 1935 raspberry season started May 28 and continued until July 29, with 932 registrations representing 2,493 pickers. Of these, 268 registrations representing 810 pickers came from out-of-state. This figure includes 137 registrations listed under "not ascertainable" and represents 417 pickers.

1935 Strawberry Season

Pickers for the 1935 strawberry season started their registrations on May 25 and continued until June 19. The total registration was 465, representing 1,351 pickers. Of those, 109 registrations, representing 261 pickers, came from out-of-state.

The total registration of pickers for this crop was the smallest of the three seasons covered in this report. This may have been due in part to the earlier date for registrations, conflicting with the school attendance of children in families that might otherwise have registered for employment.

Out-of-State

The proportion of out-of-state registrations was also the smallest, being only 19.3 per cent of the total. The proportion of registrations with addresses listed as "not ascertainable" was also the smallest, increasing the accuracy of the returns for the states listed in Table No. 3.

Certification of Entries

Inasmuch as the data were taken directly from the registration books of the Gresham office, there was no method whereby the entries showing the residence of each registrant could be verified. It is felt that the entries from the Portland area are slightly larger than the actual number of registrants living in that area. A certain portion of the registrations were no doubt made by individuals having residence outside the state, and by giving a fictitious Portland address felt their chance of obtaining employment would be increased.

Registration by Groups

Types of Groups

In the following table, a compilation has been made of each registration according to the type of group in which the pickers were living at the time of registration. This was done for each of the three seasons, and shows also the number of pickers represented in each group.

The "Non-related Group" is composed of families which are not related. An example would be the agreement of two neighboring families to travel in one car in search of employment, thereby reducing the cost of transportation to each family unit. A "Related Group" would be composed, for example, of two brothers and their respective families, traveling together for mutual advantage. The other groups listed in the table are self-explanatory.

Table No. 1 - ALL REGISTRATIONS AND PICKERS ACCORDING TO GROUPS*

ALL GROUPS		1934 Raspberry Season		1935 Raspberry Season		1935 Strawberry Season	
		No.	Reg.	No.	Reg.	No.	Reg.
No.	TOTAL	2459	851	2493	932	1351	465
1	Non-related groups	1277	285	1052	263	626	145
2	Single Persons	234	234	234	234	105	105
3	Husband and Wife	246	123	310	155	150	75
4	Two parents and one child or more	282	82	278	81	233	65
5	Related Groups	251	72	374	109	146	42
6	One parent and one child or more	169	55	245	90	91	33

*Covering all registrations and pickers for 1934 and 1935 raspberry, and 1935 strawberry season.

It is not possible in this brief report to analyze the social or economic implications suggested by either the frequency or absence of registrations by various groupings. This would best be left to a later and more comprehensive study.

BERRY PICKERS RESIDENT IN OREGON

Metropolitan Area

The majority of pickers employed in the Gresham district were resident in what is considered the metropolitan area surrounding Portland. This includes Multnomah County, the northern part of Clackamas, the northeastern tip of Yamhill and the southwestern part of Washington counties. The bulk of the labor employed came from the area within a thirty mile radius of the city of Portland.

For each of the three seasons, this area supplied more than 90 per cent of the resident labor and well over half of the total labor.

Table No. 2 - PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF REGISTRATIONS OF OREGON PICKERS

RESIDENCE	1934 Raspberries		1935 Raspberries		1935 Strawberries	
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No. of Registration	Percentage Distribution
OREGON, all	670	100%	664	100%	356	100%
Metropolitan Area	609	90	611	92	333	93.6
Rest of Oregon	61	9.1	53	8	23	6.4

Verification of Data

There is some evidence that the figures for the metropolitan area are larger than actually was the case. Several telephone numbers and Portland addresses were checked and found to be fictitious, but no careful estimate as to total error for all registrations from that area can be presented without a more involved process for verification.

Distribution

For each of the seasons covered, the percentage distribution of resident registrations in each of the five general regions of Oregon held little variation. The heaviest registration in each case was from the Portland area, with the Willamette Valley, Coast Region, Eastern Oregon and Southern Oregon following in the order named.

OUT-OF-STATE PICKERS REGISTERING

1934 Raspberry Season

There were 183 out-of-state registrations, representing 529 pickers, for the 1934 raspberry season. This represented 21.5 per cent of all pickers. Registrations were shown for persons living in seventeen states as listed in Table No. 3. Of these, Washington supplied the bulk, amounting to 14.6 per cent of all out-of-state registrations. California was second with 5.1 per cent of all out-of-state registrations. Registrations from the Rocky Mountain and Middlewestern states followed.

Residence Unknown

The accuracy of charting the spatial distribution of the picker's residences is impaired due to the frequency of registrations with no address given. There was a total of 121 whose addresses were listed as "not ascertainable," representing 64.4 per cent of all out-of-state registrations.

1935 Raspberry Season

For the 1935 raspberry season, see Table No. 4, Washington supplied most of the out-of-state labor, representing 21.2 per cent of the total. California was second with 7.7 per cent and Michigan third with 2.5 per cent. There were more middlewestern states represented than was true for the year previous.

Distribution

Out-of-state pickers represented 32.4 per cent of total pickers employed, which was an increase of 10.9 per cent over the 1934 raspberry season for non-resident pickers as shown in Table No. 3.

TABLE NO. 3

RESIDENCE DISTRIBUTION BY PERCENTAGES OF OUT-OF-STATEPICKERS REGISTERING FOR 1934 RASPBERRY SEASON

Out-of-state	Number of Registrations	Number of Pickers	% of Pickers from each state	% out-of-state pickers are of all pickers
TOTAL	183	529	100%	21.5
Washington	28	77	14.6	3.1
California	7	27	5.1	1.1
Oklahoma	4	16	3.0	.7
Nebraska	3	14	2.6	.5
South Dakota	3	5	.9	.2
Colorado	2	9	1.7	.4
Idaho	2	7	1.3	.3
Montana	2	3	.6	.1
Michigan	2	3	.6	.1
Texas	2	3	.6	.1
Iowa	2	3	.6	.1
Minnesota	1	3	.6	.1
Illinois	1	2	.4	.1
New Mexico	1	5	.9	.2
Utah	1	5	.9	.2
Wyoming	1	2	.4	.1
North Dakota	1	4	.8	.2
Not Ascertainable	121	341	64.4	13.8

RESIDENCE DISTRIBUTION BY PERCENTAGES OF OUT-OF-STATEPICKERS REGISTERING FOR 1935 RASPBERRY SEASON

Out-of-state	Number of Registrations	Number of Pickers	% of Pickers from each state	% Out-of-state pickers are of all pickers
TOTAL	268	810	100%	32.4%
Washington	53	172	21.2	6.9
California	19	62	7.7	2.4
Kansas	7	17	2.1	.7
Michigan	7	20	2.5	.8
Idaho	5	13	1.6	.5
Colorado	4	12	1.5	.4
Nebraska	4	14	1.7	.6
Missouri	4	10	1.2	.4
South Dakota	4	13	1.6	.5
Wyoming	4	9	1.1	.4
Illinois	3	7	.9	.3
Iowa	2	4	.5	.2
Indiana	2	6	.7	.2
Texas	2	10	1.2	.4
Wisconsin	2	4	.5	.2
Arizona	1	4	.5	.2
Florida	1	2	.2	.1
Minnesota	1	2	.2	.1
Mississippi	1	1	.1	.1-
Nevada	1	2	.2	.1
North Dakota	1	6	.7	.2
Oklahoma	1	1	.1	.1-
Utah	1	1	.1	.1-
New York	1	1	.1	.1-
Not Ascertainable	137	417	51.5	16.7

TABLE NO. 5

RESIDENCE DISTRIBUTION BY PERCENTAGES OF OUT-OF-STATEPICKERS REGISTERING FOR 1935 STRAWBERRY SEASON

Out-of-state	Number Registrations	Number of Pickers	% of Pickers from each state	% out-of-state pickers are of all pickers
TOTAL	109	261	100%	19.3%
Washington	27	77	29.5	5.9
California	5	10	3.9	.7
New Mexico	4	20	7.7	1.5
Kansas	3	7	2.7	.5
Arizona	2	8	3.1	.6
Colorado	2	4	1.5	.3
Idaho	2	9	3.4	.7
Nebraska	2	3	1.1	.2
Oklahoma	2	1	.4	.1-
Georgia	1	1	.4	.1-
Louisiana	1	2	.8	.1
Mississippi	1	4	1.5	.3
South Dakota	1	3	1.1	.2
Wyoming	1	1	.4	.1-
Not Ascertainable	55	111	42.5	8.2

A partial explanation of the increase in the number of other states represented might be shown by the fact that registrations were started earlier and continued several weeks later than was true in the previous year. Other factors, of too wide scope to be covered in this report, undoubtedly influenced this increase in out-of-state registrations.

1935 Strawberry Season

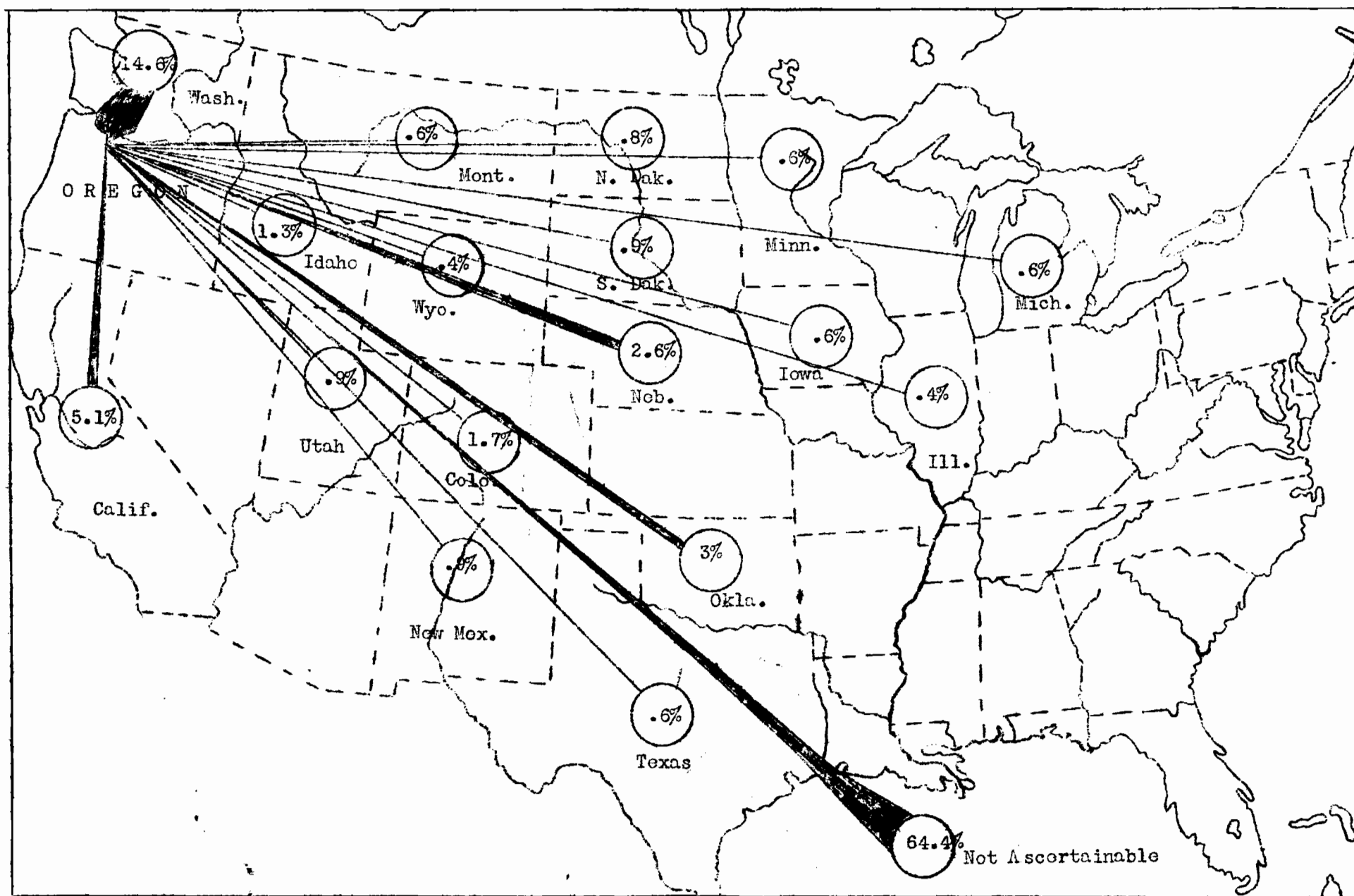
For the 1935 strawberry season there were 109 registrations from out-of-state pickers, representing 261 persons seeking employment. These were 19.3 per cent of all registrations for the season.

Distribution

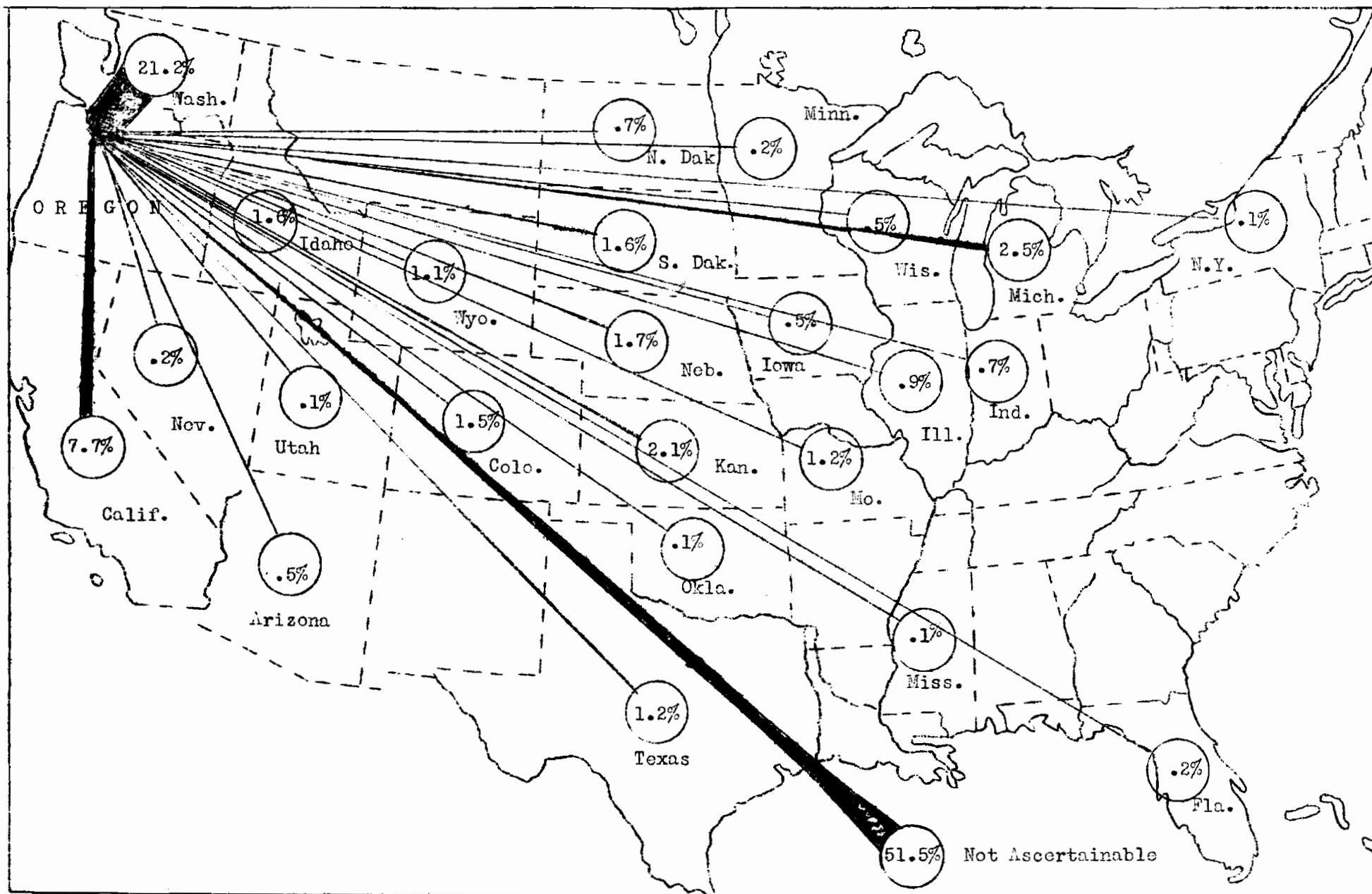
Washington supplied more labor than any other state, or 29.5 per cent of all out-of-state pickers. New Mexico was second with 7.7 per cent and California a low third with 3.9 per cent. There was a decrease of registrations coming from the Northeastern and Great Lakes states, as shown in Map No. 5.

The reason for the proportionately strong increase in the registrations from New Mexico could not be determined without a study of conditions in that particular state. A study of this scope could best be carried out on a nation-wide scale. The increases and decreases in the mobility of rural labor from the various states could be more carefully verified and analyzed as to the existing conditions and causes resulting in this shifting of rural labor.

Map No. 1
Residence of Out-of-State Pickers Registering for 1934 Raspberry Season



Map No. 2
Residence of Out-of-State Pickers Registering for 1935 Raspberry Season



Map No. 3
Residence of Out-of-State Pickers Registering for 1935 Strawberry Season

