

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
FRANCES PERKINS, Secretary  
CHILDREN'S BUREAU . . . KATHARINE F. LENROOT, Chief

# WELFARE OF FAMILIES OF SUGAR-BEET LABORERS

*A Study of Child Labor and Its Relation to  
Family Work, Income, and Living  
Conditions in 1935*

BY  
ELIZABETH S. JOHNSON



Bureau Publication No. 247

United States  
Government Printing Office  
Washington : 1939



## CONTENTS

	Page
Letter of transmittal.....	v
The problem.....	1
Summary of findings.....	3
Scope and method of study.....	6
The sugar-beet industry.....	9
Hand-labor operations.....	9
The labor-contract system.....	10
Labor migration.....	11
Characteristics of the families of sugar-beet laborers.....	13
Racial stock.....	13
Residence and migration.....	14
Previous experience in beet work.....	15
Employment relation to growers.....	15
Size and composition of families.....	16
Work of children in the sugar-beet fields.....	19
Background of child labor in the industry.....	19
Attitudes toward work of children.....	20
Methods of identifying child workers.....	22
Ages of working children.....	24
Proportion working, by age.....	24
Area differences in observance of 14-year minimum-age standard.....	26
Effect of 14-year minimum-age standard—1934 and 1935 compared.....	27
Work performed by children.....	29
The processes at which children worked.....	29
Daily hours of work.....	31
Length of working periods.....	35
Problems of effectuating compliance with child-labor standards.....	36
Interference of beet work with the schooling of children.....	41
School enrollment and absence.....	42
Application of compulsory-school-attendance standards.....	46
Special classes and modified school terms for beet workers' children.....	49
School progress.....	51
Family work and income.....	54
Amount of families' work in the beet fields.....	54
Duration of work in beet fields.....	54
Acreage handled.....	56
Differences in acreage worked per family and in use of hired help, 1934 and 1935.....	58
Wage rates.....	60
Earnings for beet work.....	61
Family earnings.....	61
Individual earnings.....	63
Supplementary work and income.....	64
Total income.....	67
Relief and use of credit.....	69
Methods of wage payment.....	69
Store credit.....	69
Relief.....	70
Living conditions.....	73
Food.....	73
Housing.....	76
Type.....	76
Overcrowding.....	76
Costs.....	77
Sanitation and water supply.....	78

Living conditions—Continued.	Page
Care and health of children.....	79
Position in the community.....	80
Conclusion.....	82
Appendix I.—Tables.....	85
Appendix II.—Labor provisions of the Jones-Costigan Act and of the sugar-beet production-adjustment contracts authorized by it.....	96
Appendix III.—Form used for labor contract between grower and beet laborer in the factory districts of one sugar company.....	98

### ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
Girl topping beets.....	Frontispiece
Acreage of sugar beets in the United States and location of areas visited.....	7
Family of Mexican beet workers.....	Facing 76
New housing for families of beet laborers constructed by a sugar com- pany.....	Facing 77
Shacks occupied by migratory beet laborers.....	Facing 77