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Costa Rican & Nicaraguan Labor Ministries Sign Accord On Seasonal Agricultural Workers

by Deborah Tyroler

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Under a new accord signed by the Costa Rican and Nicaraguan labor ministries, about 5,000 Nicaraguan agricultural workers will be allowed to enter Costa Rica as temporary contract laborers. The Nicaraguans will primarily be employed on Costa Rican coffee, banana and sugar cane plantations. Under the agreement, Nicaraguan workers will be given four-month contracts entitling them to public and workplace benefits mandated by Costa Rican law. Previously, nearly all Nicaraguans working in Costa Rican agriculture were employed as undocumented laborers, receiving less than minimum wage, few or no benefits, and subject to arbitrary firing and deportation. Costa Rican officials estimate that as many as 20,000 Nicaraguans, many of them former contras or discharged army personnel, are employed in such conditions during peak harvest seasons (see CAU, 12/06/91 and 07/31/92). Over 4,000 unemployed Nicaraguans immediately flocked to the Managua Labor Ministry headquarters to apply for admission into the program. According to government estimates, un-and-under employment affects 53% of Nicaragua's economically active population. (Source: Agence France-Presse, 01/12/93)

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