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A NEW ROLE FOR THE OLD BIO story begins on page 2



SUNRISE OVER GULF OF MEXICO at mouth of Rio Grande. Picture was taken at Gulf's high tide; the river is usually much lower. Hundreds of farms drain it for irrigation.

A NEW ROLE FOR THE OLD RIO

Its valley no longer
plagued by flash floods,
the big river irrigates
where it once destroyed



THE VALLEY is flat and, when irrigated, fertile. Truck traffic carrying 35 varieties of crops is heavy over palm-lined market roads

CARL SCHUSTER, 37, stood by a mesquite tree and looked across his 1,800-acre farm to where the Rio Grande curled between rich, black banks. He had farmed 20 years and was lean from hard work and bronze from those years under the subtropical sun.

His gesture took in the land, the river. "Sure," he drawled, "this has been tagged the 'magic valley.' It is, too. But a shift in the wind, or market, can just as easily shift it to 'tragic.'

"Don't misunderstand me. God has been mighty good to us here on the Rio Grande. We have rich delta land that the old Rio has hauled down from the Rocky Mountain country. It's a beautiful, level strip just about right for mechanical farming.

"The climate's almost tropical, so we can plant and harvest all year. We've got a fine labor supply in the Braceros; they're migrant workers we contract from Old Mexico." He smiled. "But we also have a supply of practically every bug known, to pester us the year around.

BRACEROS ACCOMPANY trailerload of cabbages from Palm Grove plantation to truck terminal. They are legally entered farm workers from Old Mexico who contract to help valley harvests.



Photos by JOHN LEWIS STAGE



A DIFFERENT SORT of crop, but high-yielding, are Brahman cattle. They graze in rich pastures or on greens left from a carrot harvest.



EARLY SETTLER Benita Garcia checks depth of cotton seed planted by International 4-row planter.



TODAY, the 66-year-old Garcia and his nephew Henry, 15, can work *with* not against, the Rio.



THE VALLEY is rich, the climate favorable. But, lacking water, only mesquite flourishes on the desolate flats.

"But we're short in one department—water. The Valley's economy depends on water: how much we get, how we use what we get."

Carl Schuster had described the situation of those who farm the fabulous lower valley of the Rio Grande—the strip of delta two to forty miles wide bordering Mexico from Falcon Dam on the west to Brownsville, 125 miles southeast, and on to the Gulf of Mexico.

Natives call the four southernmost Texas counties "The Valley." Synonymous with much that can be good or bad for agriculture, its name evokes memories of fortunes won or lost, bandits riding out of a mesquite jungle to plunder towns, a real estate boom in the 1920s, and disastrous floods.

The Valley is a dry fertile land south of the 1,000,000-acre King Ranch. It is an area where great reserves of oil and gas are being discovered, tourists centers are developing, and where that agricultural wonder, the pink grapefruit, is grown.

Historically, it was settled by the Spanish long before settlements dotted the eastern United States. Later it was fought over in

the Mexican War of 1846 and the War Between the States.

Farming became possible only after an irrigation project was started in the 1890s, when a sugar refinery was built at Brownsville. But it remained an area of dry, cracked flats and mesquite brush from where bandits flourished as late as the 1920s. Then hard-surfaced roads tied it more closely to markets, and farming became profitable.

The lack of water (annual rainfall is 27 inches) has made farming difficult; too often too much has washed away the results of years to make it pay. The history of The Valley is filled with accounts of flash floods; the channel of the Rio has been choked with soil and crops spilling into the Gulf.

To stop this waste, and to stimulate further development of this rich region, the governments of Mexico and the United States erected a five-mile-long dam across the river in 1953 at a cost of \$47 million. Falcon Dam will be joined by two others to not only retain water for irrigation but to control the tons that once swept over fields when the Rio rumpaged.



GROUP OF MEXICAN CHILDREN make a swimming hole of the International boundary river, across from Progresso, Texas. Night swimming of adult "wetbacks" has halted under new system of work contracts.



NEW UTILITY 300 TRACTOR cleans canal bank near Weslaco. Farmers finance irrigation canals on cooperative basis.



CARL SCHUSTER, one of Valley's larger successful farmers, raises 17 different kinds of vegetables and 600 Santa Gertrudis and Whiteface Hereford cattle on his 1,800 irrigated acres. He came to The Valley at 15, grew up under the sun at San Juan, knows what the Rio's rampages have done to crops and hopes of men.



HAND LABOR IN THE RICH FERTILE FLATS is giving way to mechanization. On Carl Schuster's farm, an International motor truck services tractor in field.



MAN-POWERED, TWO-CAR FERRY at Los Ebanos is an official port of entry into United States. Custom man waits 50 yards up dirt road. Ferry runs every hour, six days a week.

onions, green corn, beans, watermelon, spinach, parsley, broccoli, lettuce, cucumbers, cantaloupes and turnips. They are harvested with the help of the Braceros, who last year also gathered 400,000 bales of cotton from the delta.

Braceros make up The Valley's main work force. The much-publicized "wet-back" is seldom seen now, except those who show up during cotton harvest. Cotton became an important crop after some percent of fruit trees were killed by severe frosts in 1951-52.

The magic climate that appeals to farmers like Carl Schuster has begun also to attract large numbers of tourists and winter residents. Resort building has increased as The Valley prepares to harvest from another source—the tourists streaming through it and over three main bridges leading to Old Mexico.

THE VIEW EAST from top of earth-filled Falcon Dam at head of The Valley. White concrete posts and chain are Mexico boundary.



CLEARING LAND is never-ending chore. B. P. Strunk draws a seven-yard dirt buggy with his International W-9. 700,000 valley acres are irrigated.



FRED E. PILGRIM has an International dealership just two blocks away from the Gateway Bridge spanning from Brownsville, Texas, to Old Mexico.



SUNDAY MORNING the waters of the Rio, stored in Harlingen reservoir, are fished by Billy and Everette Clark and Claude Bushman, of nearby San Benita.