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The Labor Shortage in the Shrimp Industry

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SYMPOSIUM OBJECTIVES

THE TITLE OF THIS SYMPOSIUM may be a little misleading since it will be concerned only with the shortage of shrimp vessel personnel and will not include shortages in the many facets of shoreside operations. Actually, I think we will be doing well if we can cover this one subject thoroughly.

Since almost every undertaking these days must have an objective, we could easily meet this requirement by stating that our objective is the dissemination of knowledge. We know, however, that for our best interests and yours, this is too broad an objective and that we must be more specific. Let me set forth the following objectives of this symposium: (1) to determine the extent of the shortage of shrimp fishermen and to outline the present practices prevailing in the operation of shrimp vessels including recruitment practices, skills required, wages and benefits, working conditions and so forth; (2) to document efforts the industry has made to solve the problem through training programs, public relations and utilizing the services of the Federal and state employment agencies; (3) to ascertain the various training programs available and (4) to suggest industry action to determine the type of training program that will attract candidates and provide the greatest chance for success. Industry must itself provide working conditions and compensation that will attract and retain graduates of training programs.

Although many of these objectives will be met through the various remarks of the symposium panel members, only with the full participation of the audience will all of the pertinent issues be discussed and a course for solving the problems charted.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Before calling upon our first speaker, let me give a few specifics concerning the shrimp fleet. The U.S. shrimp fleet has about 4,000 vessels over 5-gross tons. This represents about 33% of all U.S. fishing vessels over 5-gross tons. About 2,000 of the shrimp vessels are in the 25- to 69-gross ton range, 45 to 65 feet; and 475 are in the 70- to 99-gross ton range 65 to 75 feet. It is in-

teresting that over half, or 250, of this latter group were added to the fleet in 1967.

Let us assume that our main problem lies in obtaining crews for the vessels in the 45- to 65-foot range. Now we might ask, "What are the principal accommodation characteristics of shrimp vessels in this size range?" While we do not have specifics that apply only to shrimp vessels, we do have them combined for all the fishing vessels in the 45- to 65-foot range.

Our sample, which included a proportionate share of shrimp vessels, revealed the following about the crews' quarters. Ventilation facilities are installed in 27%; 80% have lockers; 74% have a table; and 82% are protected from shafts and other moving gear.

Now, how about the general characteristics? A cook is employed on 21% of the vessels. A wash basin is available on 78% and 10% have hot water. Medicine chests, which contain at least aspirin and bandages, are on 96% and 18% of the officers have first aid training. And finally, 85% of the vessels make trips of more than 36 hours.

Now to the important business of this symposium, which will include a number of short talks by the symposium members.