

By: Guillen

H.R. No. 2709

R E S O L U T I O N

1 WHEREAS, In 1966 and 1967, Latino farmworkers in the lower
2 Rio Grande Valley banded together to fight for higher wages and
3 better working conditions in what came to be known as the Starr
4 County Melon Strike; and

5 WHEREAS, In the mid-1960s, workers on Texas farms were making
6 around 40 cents an hour, and they often labored through long days in
7 the hot sun, in fields with no access to toilets or fresh water; the
8 workers sought the help of Cesar Chavez and the National Farm
9 Workers Association, which later became known as the United Farm
10 Workers, and in May 1966, organizer Eugene Nelson of the NFWA
11 arrived in Rio Grande City; and

12 WHEREAS, With the guidance of Mr. Nelson, the farm laborers
13 met in a movie theater and established the Independent Workers'
14 Association, and on June 1, 1966, 400 people went on strike against
15 six melon farms in Starr County, demanding a wage of \$1.25 an hour
16 and recognition as a labor bargaining entity; many of the strikers
17 were arrested and some were beaten; the courts later held that a
18 number of the laws used to justify the arrests were
19 unconstitutional; and

20 WHEREAS, Seeking to increase public awareness of their
21 struggle, the workers began a 400-mile, two-month march to the
22 State Capitol on July 4, 1966; along the way, the marchers met with
23 Governor John Connally in New Braunfels, and on Labor Day, they
24 rallied with 10,000 supporters on the grounds of the statehouse; as

1 a result of "La Marcha," such groups as the Texas Council of
2 Churches, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, and the U.S. Senate
3 Subcommittee on Migratory Labor began to focus on the plight of
4 workers in the Rio Grande Valley; and

5 WHEREAS, The strike came to an end in 1967, but it sowed the
6 seeds of a Latino rights movement in South Texas and eventually
7 helped bring about increased wages and the passage of state and
8 federal laws that required farm owners to provide sanitation and
9 clean drinking water for laborers; and

10 WHEREAS, Half a century ago, proud Latino farmworkers and
11 their allies joined together to fight for economic justice and
12 their fundamental human rights, forging a heroic and influential
13 chapter in the history of the Lone Star State; now, therefore, be it

14 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 85th Texas
15 Legislature hereby commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Starr
16 County Melon Strike.