

Adam Tompkins. *Ghostworkers and Greens: The Cooperative Campaigns of Farmworkers and Environmentalists for Pesticide Reform.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016. Illustrations. 248 pp. \$88.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8014-5668-8.



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Adam Tompkins's *Ghostworkers and Greens: The Cooperative Campaigns of Farmworkers and Environmentalists for Pesticide Reform* is an informative study of how farm labor organizations and environmental organizations allied with each other from the 1960s until the Bush administration with the aim of regulating pesticide use. Using the analogy of addiction, Tompkins argues that growers and government researchers became accustomed to pesticide use during the second half of the nineteenth century. This created "path dependence" as the national energy system matured and placed increased faith in chemical research, which is perhaps represented best by the troubled history of modern entomology (p. 2). This dependence became acute when widespread perceptions of economic scarcity provided an opportunity for pesticide proponents to argue that the loss of competitive advantage justified the continued application of toxic chemicals like DDT and methyl bromide to agricultural products.

Tompkins's investigation relies on archival sources, government reports, court decisions, and

publications by farmworkers and environmental organizations. Beginning with an overview of the history of applied entomology since the 1870s, Tompkins suggests that the ten to fifteen years after World War II was a critical period in which the scale of pesticide research and use expanded tremendously. While eschewing oversimplified interpretations of their internal tensions, *Ghostworkers and Greens* presents these farmworker-environmentalist alliances as navigating tenuously between unity and divisions over strategies and tactics. One of the book's major contributions is research on farmworker-environmental alliances for increased pesticide regulation in Arizona and Florida, which have received less attention from historians than Texas and California.

Tompkins argues that brokers—especially entomologists—were key mediators who "negotiated the cultural terrain of diverse movements to foster working relationships" between farmworkers, environmental organizations, and politicians (p. 10). One significant finding is that regulators and policymakers often needed timely information to

analyze the costs and benefits of applying new pesticides. While it provided a possible point of collaboration between farmworkers and environmentalists, the process of gathering data on pesticides was also vulnerable to interference by growers and anti-regulation politicians. What remains unresolved is whether the limited success of the farmworker-environmental coalition was a result of these brokers or the conservative shift in politics more generally during the 1980s.

Despite both the emergence of local coalitions and continued support by high-level leaders of the Sierra Club for farmworkers' organizing campaigns during the 1970s and 1980s, there was a number of obstacles for solidarity. Although the goals of farmworkers and environmentalists differed at times (such as with organizing for a contract versus changing regulatory laws), Tompkins asserts that this did not necessarily signify conflicting interests. Indeed, one of the tensions in his books is the extent to which there were divisions among *both* farmworkers and environmentalists over tactical questions, such as the effectiveness of boycott. This also helps explain the actions of the opponents of regulation, who separated issues of hazardous working conditions for farmworkers from contaminated drinking for suburban communities. While Tompkins draws our attention to this shrewd strategy, the extent to which it was successful in preventing unity between farmworkers and environmentalists remains uncertain.

One of the more satisfying conclusions of *Ghostworkers and Greens* lays with Tompkins's analysis of the impact of timing on local coalitions for pesticide regulation. Depending on where one was, timing could be either disadvantageous or fortuitous for the farmworker-environmentalist coalition. While residents of Scottsdale, Arizona, lost interest in pesticide regulation by the end of the 1970s, during the following decade demographic growth increased the power of urban counties relative to rural municipalities that

growers had long controlled. This, Tompkins suggests, provided space for "ghostworkers" and environmentalists in Arizona to pass a referendum for more stringent pesticide regulations (p. 85).

Like Frank Bardacke's *Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers* (2012), *Ghostworkers and Greens* is a significant contribution to the growing historiography on the United Farm Workers and environmental reform. With cogent analysis of how farmworkers and environmentalists grappled with issues of solidarity and shared interests during and after the 1960s, Tompkins's book produces new questions about the uneven successes of these local and state coalitions. Did the conservative resurgence of the 1970s and 1980s limit the effectiveness of the efforts of farmworkers and environmentalists to regulate pesticide use, or were these mixed results themselves effects of long-term path dependence? To what extent did the contingencies of timing and pesticide research affect the outcomes of these campaigns, and was this as true in California and Florida as it was in Arizona?

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