



## NHL Executive Summary



**Name of Property:** Rio Vista Bracero Reception Center  
**City, State:** Socorro, Texas  
**Period of Significance:** 1951-1964  
**NHL Criteria:** 1  
**NHL Theme:** VIII. Changing Role of the US in the World Community  
 4. Immigration and Emigration Policies  
**Previous Recognition:** 1996 National Register of Historic Places  
**National Historic Context:** *American Latino Theme Study (2013), American Labor History Theme Study (2021)*

### NHL Significance:

- The Rio Vista Bracero Reception Center is nationally significant for its association with the Mexican Farm Labor Program of 1951-64, which was jointly administered by the US and Mexico. The largest single temporary alien worker program ever undertaken by the United States, it embraced more than 4.2 million bracero contracts for more than two million unique individuals. The highpoint of the program came in 1956, with 445,197 bracero contracts. Braceros were deployed to thirty-eight states but mostly worked in a smaller number of jurisdictions, mostly along the Mexican border.
- The bracero program stimulated migration between Mexico and the US, encouraging documented and undocumented movement of bracero farmworkers and others to this country in the early 1950s and after. This pattern of Mexican migration contributed to a postwar increase in the US Latino population, particularly in states from Texas westward.
- Braceros comprised nearly a quarter of US agricultural workers by 1959, greatly enhancing the profitability of the US agribusiness sector; providing a steady, reliable supply of highly-skilled farmworkers at relatively low wages; and permitting expansion of certain crop sectors. Bracero labor played a pivotal role in transforming California's agricultural landscape by creating large single-crop districts across the state.
- The bracero program was controversial and drew criticism throughout its existence over



concerns it resulted in worker exploitation and negatively impacted domestic farmworkers. Opponents of the plan argued growers failed to consistently observe protective aspects of the bilateral agreement negotiated with Mexico in terms of pay, work conditions, food, housing, and discrimination, as well as exposure to pesticides and other environmental toxins.

- Rio Vista served as one of five critical way stations along the US-Mexico border, linking the recruitment of workers in the interior of Mexico with their eventual places of employment on US farms and ranches. The reception center operated throughout the life of the program, issuing 800,000 bracero contracts between 1951 and 1964 and sending braceros to worksites in Texas, New Mexico, the northern and central plains, upper Midwest, and Rocky Mountain states.

**Integrity:**

- Rio Vista retains a high degree of historic integrity dating to the period of national significance (1951-1964). Thirty of the thirty-three resources within the district are assessed as contributing. Principal changes include construction of one building not associated with the bracero program, installation of small commemorative/interpretive elements, and a few window and door alterations.

**Owner of Property:** City of Socorro, Socorro, Texas, and Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas.

**Acreage of Property:** 11.1 acres

**Origins of Nomination:** The nomination was funded in collaboration between the National Park Service Heritage Partnerships Program (Regions 6, 7, and 8), a National Park Service Underrepresented Communities grant (Historic Preservation Fund), the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the City of Socorro. The project developed in two phases, including research utilizing oral histories with former braceros and center employees.

**Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:**

- Designation of Rio Vista will recognize its national significance and raise awareness of the bracero program and its importance to agricultural, migration, and labor history.
- Designation will also raise awareness for preservation of the complex and aid efforts by the City of Socorro to stabilize, reuse, and interpret the site.

**Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:** None known.

**Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of August 21, 2023):**

- Mark Wolfe, Executive Director, Texas Historical Commission (Texas State Historic Preservation Office)
- Veronica Escobar, U.S. House of Representatives
- Tony Gonzales, U.S. House of Representatives
- Patrick Stover, Director, Texas A&M AgriLife Research
- Shanna Edberg, Director of Conservation Programs, Hispanic Access Foundation



- Sarah Zenaida Gould and Desiree Aranda, Board Co-Chairs, Latinos in Heritage Conservation
- Evan Thompson, Executive Director, Preservation Texas
- Gary Williams, Senior Program Officer, El Paso Community Foundation
- Mary E. González, Texas House of Representatives
- Francisco Uviña-Contreras, Director, Historic Preservation and Regionalism Graduate Certificate Program, School of Architecture and Planning, University of New Mexico
- Rob Nieweg, Vice President, Preservation Services & Outreach Department, National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Victor Reta, Director, Public Relations, Recreation, Special Events & Historic Preservation for the City of Socorro, Texas
- Adriana Rodarte, City Manager, City of Socorro, Texas
- Amy Webb, National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Sehila Mota Casper, City of Austin/formerly of the National Trust for Historic Preservation

**Landmarks Committee Comments:**

- When Congress allowed the Bracero program to sunset, there were numerous Congress persons against it. Mention if there were any politicians in support of the program.
- Expand the international significance of the program and the Braceros role in shaping immigration policies. Mention its contribution to the new Immigration Act of 1965.
- Nomination downplays the bracero health screening making it sound more benign than it actually was. The nomination should make clear it was an invasive and dehumanizing process that started with the assumption that the Mexican workers were a health threat. Perhaps change the subheading for that section to "Health Inspection."

**Landmarks Committee Recommendation:**

The Committee recommends that the National Park System Advisory Board recommend to the Secretary of the Interior the designation of the Rio Vista Bracero Reception Center in Socorro, Texas, as a National Historic Landmark, with any additions and corrections as noted by the Committee being made prior to the nomination being forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior for action.

**Advisory Board Recommendation:** The National Park System Advisory Board recommends to the Secretary of the Interior the designation of the Rio Vista Bracero Reception Center in Socorro, Texas, as a National Historic Landmark.