



SANDY SUMMERS/Yakima Herald-Republic

Guadalupe Gamboa, left, national vice-president of the United Farmworkers, speaks at a news conference Wednesday morning

prior to a Yakima forum on working conditions for apple industry workers. Gamboa called for improved conditions.

Officials hear opinions of apple industry workers, pledge talks on tighter enforcement of labor laws

By DAVID LESTER
YAKIMA HERALD-REPUBLIC

State and federal officials Wednesday pledged further talks on tightening enforcement of labor laws to protect the rights of farm workers.

Better enforcement of existing laws, which also drew the support of an agriculture representative participating in an international labor forum, may offer a better chance for change, government and labor officials said.

That theme was repeated several times both during and outside a daylong forum at Yakima Valley Community College, conducted under an agreement between the

MEXICAN GROWERS PROTEST

Thousands of poor growers mass in Mexico City on Wednesday to protest what they see as President Vicente Fox's pro-business, pro-U.S. economic policies. 9A

United States and Mexican governments.

Attended by some 250 people at its peak, including farm workers, regulators, worker advocates and the industry, the forum consumed more than nine hours at the Hopf Union Building on the college campus.

Workers testified about wage violations, retaliation for union activity, and health prob-

lems associated with work in the apple industry.

Mike Gempler, executive director of the Washington Growers League, said current laws meet international standards, but emphasized better enforcement would help.

The forum is one part of a May 2000 agreement between the U.S. and Mexican labor secretaries, forged to address Mexican labor-union complaints that farm labor in the state's apple industry is being denied basic rights.

The 1998 complaint is the first ever filed against an entire industry under the labor side agreement to the North American Free

PLEASE SEE **FORUM** PAGE 5A