



The United Farm Workers has made Pictsweet a key target.

# PICKERS: Workers Cheer New State Law

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tura refused to comment on the issue. Other company representatives, in Tennessee and Los Angeles, could not be reached for comment.

Some farm industry leaders, who worked to defeat the measure and believe the fight will continue in court, agree that Pictsweet could be among the first targets of the new law, assuming it survives legal challenges.

Rob Roy, general counsel for the Ventura County Agricultural Assn., noted that union officials have long held up Pictsweet as a symbol of the need for reform. "Without a doubt, I think Pictsweet is going to be high on the UFW hit list," Roy said.

However, Roy and other farm



Photos by STEPHEN OSMAN / Los Angeles Times

Workers at Pictsweet, Southern California's largest mushroom farm, return to their jobs after a break. They have been without a contract since 1987, when Tennessee-based United Foods bought the company, and talks have long been stalled despite numerous attempts.

industry attorneys say the fight is not over.

Growers are considering a court challenge, arguing that the new state measure favors farm labor unions, destroys the collective bargaining process and unfairly burdens farm owners with a remedy unavailable in any other private industry.

Moreover, growers say the new law allows representatives of a

government agency—the state's Agricultural Labor Relations Board—to impose terms of a labor contract, a constitutional violation. And, in the case of Pictsweet, growers say the new law could result in a UFW contract at a company at which a number of workers have sought to decertify the union, saying it does not represent their interests.

"Under the law, you could have

a large segment of the work force very dissatisfied with the contract and yet have the contract forced on them," Roy said. "Once again, [the farm industry] gets something stuffed down its throat."

The UFW first won a contract at the Ventura mushroom farm in 1975, in one of the first elections held under the Agricultural Labor Relations Act, union officials said. The agreement paved the way for the union to negotiate contracts with half a dozen other mushroom growers in California and Florida.

The union maintained contracts with a series of owners at the Ventura plant over the years, but that ended when Tennessee-based United Foods Inc. bought it in 1987.

Since then, UFW officials say

they have tried a number of times to hammer out a new contract, kicking the effort into high gear two years ago.

Gathered outside the plant Tuesday, UFW supporters said they hoped the new law would put an end to the stalemate.

"It is very good what has happened because it has given us the means to get a contract, so we don't have to fight any longer," said mushroom picker Manuel Solomon, 59, who spent his day off Monday in Los Angeles with UFW co-founder and Vice President Dolores Huerta for a vigil outside the governor's downtown office. "This is very important to the advancement of all farm workers."

Times staff writer Sandra Murrillo contributed to this report.

