

**Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program as a Model of Best Practices in Migrant Worker Participation in the Benefits of Economic Globalization Project**

**“Social Relations Practices  
between  
Seasonal Agricultural Workers, their Employers,  
and the Residents of Rural Ontario”**

**Executive Summary**

**Prepared for The North-South Institute**

**by**

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## **Executive Summary**

Since the late 1960s, the Canadian government has granted temporary employment authorization to men and women as agricultural workers in the horticultural industry, first from the Caribbean and later from Mexico. The number of people employed under the Caribbean and Mexican Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) is significant; in 2002, over 15,000 foreign workers were employed in agriculture in the Province of Ontario alone.<sup>1</sup> While the Program is designated as seasonal, many foreign workers will spend up to eight months living and working in Canada's rural communities.

Previous research on Mexican and Caribbean farm labour in Canada has taken a critical historical perspective and focused on labour relations (Satzewich, 1991; Wall, 1998). More recent studies have concentrated on the limited rights of guest workers relative to domestic workers and documented their working and living conditions (Basok, 2002; Colby, 1997; Preibisch, 2000; Smart, 1998). Other studies have explored the obstacles to the productive investment of remittances in migrants' home communities (Basok, 2000) or demonstrated preference for the Canadian guest worker program to undocumented migration to the United States (Colby, 1997). This growing literature, however, has neglected to study the social and economic changes in Canadian rural communities that have accompanied the agricultural sector's growing reliance on foreign workers. Apart from Cecil and Ebanks' (1991) research in the late 1980s, questions of social exclusion and the overall relations between migrant workers and rural communities have been raised only tangentially relative to other concerns within the literature on migrant agricultural workers in Canada.

This component of our research contributes to filling this gap within the literature on migrant agricultural workers in Canada, with a central focus on the social relations that exist between the migrants and the settled community in rural Canada. The research documents workers' range of experiences while they reside and work in Canada's rural farming communities, with particular attention to the structure and quality of the social relations among workers, their employers and the larger community.

The study involved both primary and secondary research in the Province of Ontario, where approximately 85 per cent of SAWP workers were employed in 2002. The research design adopted a qualitative approach using case study methodology that was multi-method in focus. Throughout the research process, observations were recorded in field notes and photographs. In order to record perceptions and attitudes, interviews constituted the principal research method. Research participants included government and industry representatives active in the administration of the SAWP, growers

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<sup>1</sup> Ontario receives approximately 85 per cent of workers entering Canada as part of the Caribbean and Mexican Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program.

employing migrant farm workers, Mexican and Jamaican farm workers, residents of rural communities, and members of groups that engage in advocacy and/or service provision for migrant farm workers. In total, interviews were conducted with 104 informants.

Considering the scope of the research and its objective to study complex social relations, a qualitative approach was deemed the most suitable. Indeed, the study was less concerned with making inferences or quantifying social exclusion than it was in gaining a deeper understanding of the human experiences of workers employed in the SAWP with a focus on their relationships with employers and the broader community. Given the sheer variation among and across producers, any research endeavour that intended to generalize on community relations for the province as a whole would require a research budget and time line that were beyond the scope of our project. Our research modestly chose two different research sites to illustrate and contrast the different contexts in which migrant farm workers work and live: Simcoe County, employing a smaller number of migrant agricultural workers in primarily vegetable field crops, and the Niagara region, accounting for a larger concentration of migrant agricultural workers in tender fruit, vineyards, and greenhouse production. The results of this study should be read within its limitations. The findings presented here, however, have been arrived at through careful, rigorous analysis and extensive use of triangulation. This study represents one of the first and most comprehensive attempts to understand and contextualize the complex relations that have developed between migrant workers, their employers, and rural communities to date.

## **Part 1: Working and Living Conditions**

Part One of the report explores the working and living conditions of migrant agricultural workers, based on the specific instances observed and documented in the two study sites as well as information from interviews with administrators, community residents, and advocacy groups. The objective of Part One is to provide a sketch of workers' experience at their workplace in order to contextualize the remainder of the report that directly addresses the main research questions regarding employer and community relations.

Agricultural work differs greatly depending on the production process, but in general can be characterized as physically demanding, tedious, and potentially dangerous. Our research finds that farm workers face significant work-related health and safety risks, including heat stress, exposure to pesticides, and workplace injuries. Mental health issues such as stress and depression were also reported to be prevalent among women and workers who spent extended periods in Canada. Injuries and illnesses have the potential to become more serious because many workers reported working while sick, reluctant to advise their employers in fear of being sent back to their home country or of losing hours at work. When the research found examples of workers reporting a health concern, they do not receive prompt medical attention in all cases. Mexican workers face problems communicating their concerns because of language issues. The research also heard allegations that doctors have colluded with employers to avoid compensation claims.

Workers in this study reported coming to Canada in the hope of working 40 hours a week at the very minimum. In general, the work week extends from 40 to 70 hours per week, six to seven days per week. While some employment sites have excessively long hours, seven days a week, other employers stipulate a day off in order to improve the welfare and productivity of their workers. Pay rates for migrant agricultural workers are low relative to wages in other sectors and relative to migrant farm workers in the US under the H-2A Program. Workers, advocacy groups, and home country representatives are of the view that the prevailing wage rate needs revising upwards. The study heard reports of employment sites where Canadian workers are getting paid more than foreign workers for the same tasks, yet other sites in which it is suspected that domestic workers supplied through labourer contractors are getting paid less. Several of the labour supply country representatives support recognition for the seniority and skills of migrant agricultural workers. Employers are concerned, however, that wage increases would erode their profit margin and render them less competitive than their US counterparts.

The deductions made to workers' pay are significant. In 2001, the Canadian government collected over \$9.5 million in income taxes, \$3.4 million in EI deductions, and \$6.0 million in CPP deductions from migrant agricultural workers (Stevens Associates, 2003).<sup>2</sup> Income tax returns, the responsibility of liaison officers, are processed differently by each country government. Mexican workers express a great deal of confusion around income tax deductions; many workers are unaware if a return has been filed on their behalf. Informants claim the Mexican Consulate did not process income tax returns properly in the past. In regards to EI and CPP, some workers do not fully understand the deductions they were making or how to access potential benefits. Canadian pensions for migrant agricultural workers are often low because they rarely work in Canada until they are 60. Temporary agricultural workers face obstacles such as age discrimination and may be unwilling to engage in such physically demanding work and/or extend their migration periods into their later years. The main criticism of the Compulsory Savings Scheme that is deducted from Caribbean workers by the small group of Jamaican workers interviewed for this study was the delay in receiving their money promptly.

Our research finds significant variation in the type of living arrangements for migrant agricultural workers. Workers usually live on the grower's property in houses, trailers, or living quarters that have been furnished within work buildings. Employers with fewer than 30 workers are likely to provide trailers or farmhouses, while farming operations hiring a higher number of workers provide bunkhouses or a series of smaller units. There are great discrepancies in the quality of accommodations: while some employers provide spacious housing in good condition, other accommodations are overcrowded and dilapidated. Inadequate furnishings and facilities emerged as a central issue.

There were indications that good living conditions may foster a sense of pride among workers and consequently, a desire to maintain the dwelling in good shape. On the other hand, poor living conditions degrade migrant workers' experience in Canada.

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<sup>2</sup> All figures are in Canadian dollars, unless otherwise indicated.

Inadequate legislation and enforcement permits these situations to arise. Housing standards for employers of migrant workers follow provincial Ministry of Health guidelines that have not been updated since 1982. Furthermore, since housing inspection is the responsibility of public health officials at the municipal or regional level, inconsistencies may exist across the province. Problems with enforcement also lie with liaison officers' reluctance to be too strict with employers for fear of losing labour placements to another labour source country.

## **Part 2: Social Relations between Migrant Agricultural Workers and their Employers**

Part Two of the report argues that the relations that develop between workers and their employers and the broader community are shaped by the characteristics of the SAWP that circumscribe the conditions under which temporary workers are admitted to work in Canada. When the Program has come under media scrutiny, industry and government representatives are quick to point out that the problems are owing to a fraction of "bad" employers soiling the reputation of a model program of labour recruitment. Discussions of labour relations that look at the incidence of "bad" employers versus "good" employers ignore the structural features of the SAWP that restrict worker rights or limit their exercise. A key dimension of the Program that structures relations are immigration restrictions that bind temporary workers to a single employer and residential location. This status within the workforce sets migrant workers apart from citizens or permanent residents who have the option of finding another job and, therefore, the benefit of potentially greater bargaining power. Further, temporary workers' legal status denies them the range of services and protections associated with citizenship or permanent residency.

A further aspect of temporary employment authorization structuring labour relations is workers' civil status upon recruitment and their entry as single applicants. Preference in recruitment has been biased historically toward married/cohabitating workers or single workers with dependents in order to deter workers from attempting to secure permanent residency through marriage or seeking to remain in Canada illegally. This characteristic of the SAWP treats workers as members of family on the one hand, yet single applicants on the other, as they are unable to bring— or visit—their families during their course of work in Canada. The fact that workers have limited social commitments in Canada is one of the reasons they are particularly valuable to employers, a finding extensively corroborated in this study. "Good" workers were those who limited their social activity. The research documented cases of employers who discourage and attempt to control migrant workers' social lives, to the extent of switching labour source countries to diffuse the development of social networks.

Mechanisms for employment recruitment and retention play a role in structuring labour relations. Renewal of employment is conditional on the growers' request of workers by name. The naming policy works to discipline workers, as consecutive employment depends on the employer's subjective recommendation. Workers' compliance and willingness to accept the low wages and degrading working conditions in

Canadian agriculture is in part due to the economic and social conditions in their countries of origin that motivate them to seek work outside national borders in the first place. There is significant evidence that Mexico and the Caribbean have faced declining wage rates, growing impoverishment, and increased dependence on international remittances in recent years.

Housing arrangements under the SAWP can result, potentially, to increased control over farm workers' behaviour, including restrictions on workers' mobility on and off the farm and the entry of visitors. Our findings indicate that the extent of worker mobility depended ultimately on the subjective goodwill of the individual employer. The research heard of cases of employers who prohibited workers from leaving the property as well as others that provided a vehicle for workers' use. The control that employers exercise on their property is buttressed through their capacity to set down "farm rules." There are no specifications on the content of farm rules. It is not surprising that the research found wide variations in farm rules among employers; while some were fairly restrictive, others were more relaxed.

Perhaps the principal mechanism of control structuring relationships is the power that employers hold to repatriate workers. Part of the reason that the threat of repatriation is an effective mechanism of control is because workers and their representatives have little recourse to reverse or question the decision. If an employer decides to dismiss a worker, s/he phones the Liaison Service to make arrangements to send the individual home. The Liaison Service can intervene and attempt to remedy the situation, but if the employer insists on dismissing the employee there is little scope for action.

Genuine representation of workers on behalf of home country officials is compromised in their dual role of ensuring worker protection under the SAWP and maintaining their country's market share of labour placements in the Program. When employers are displeased with the behaviour of either their workers or the supply country representatives, they have the option of switching countries. This argument should not suggest that home country representatives do not always act in the interest of workers, but rather that their representation is compromised by their other responsibilities. Labour replacement is currently favouring Mexican workers over those from other labour supply countries. While accounting for just 22 per cent of total workers in 1987, by 2001 Mexican workers accounted for more than 51 per cent.

The dimensions of the Program that structure labour relations are reinforced by the narrow range of legal rights accorded to farm workers in Ontario. For example, farm workers are not covered under the provincial Occupational Health and Safety Act and are not free to join unions. A final structural determinant of the nature of labour relations that develop is the size of farming enterprise. The relationships that develop on small, so-called "family farms" employing one or two workers differ from those typical in corporate operations. Workers on large farms have limited direct contact with their employers.

Analysis of the structural determinants of labour relations indicates that discussions centering on incidences of "bad" employers versus "good" employers risk overlooking

the structural features of the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program that subordinate temporary agricultural workers relative to citizens and permanent residents and relative to workers in other sectors. Furthermore, this analysis suggests that the scope for abuses to occur is institutionally embedded into the Program. Within this context, it is not surprising that our research found a range of worker-employer relationships, confirming that in the absence of firmer regulation and enforcement of working and living conditions or expanded rights for farm labour, the experience of migrant agricultural workers in Canada is largely dependent on the subjective goodwill of the employer.

### **Part 3: Social Relations between Migrant Workers and Rural Communities**

Part Three of this study confirms findings in the literature that migrant agricultural workers do experience social exclusion from the broader rural community and that residents, for the most part, are either unaware or choose to ignore the migrant worker community living in their midst. At the same time, however, our research suggests an important shift in the relations between migrant workers and the surrounding communities is underway. Firstly, the social environment has changed. While settlements in rural Ontario are still predominantly composed of people with Caucasian features and white skin, there are more visible minorities living in these areas than in the past. In addition to demographic changes in the rural citizenry, temporary farm labour is increasingly taking on heightened relevance in agriculture with burgeoning numbers of migrant agricultural workers coming to the province each year. The increased visibility of migrant agricultural workers as a social group is reflected in, and enhanced by, recent media attention to their working conditions and renewed pressure for unionization by labour activists. Secondly, the nature of relationships between the migrant and permanent communities is undergoing small but perceptible transformations. In accordance with the existing literature it is accurate to claim that, for the most part, social relations between migrant workers and the broader community occur mainly through commercial interactions. In the last five years, however, efforts to integrate workers in the broader community have emerged throughout southern Ontario, particularly in churches. Further, members of the permanent Canadian community and migrant agricultural workers are increasingly forming relationships as friends, lovers, and/or spouses.

The level of awareness of the existence of Caribbean and Mexican migrant workers among the population of southern Ontario is generally low. Various factors play a role in facilitating or impeding social interaction, but the extent to which residents become aware of migrant workers and interact with them depends on physical proximity. Towns receiving the highest proportion of the migrant agricultural labour force have become economic and social hubs for migrant workers on weekends. The opportunity for social contact between residents and migrant workers in these areas is considerably greater than other regions in the province; there are several other towns that host very few workers in their vicinities. It is also important to note that the size of the community—whether it is a small farming community or a large urban centre—may influence the level of awareness of migrant workers among the settled community. Residents of small farming communities are much more likely to have had contact with offshore workers than those

living in cities, even when a significant number of workers are employed on the surrounding agricultural land.

Social contact between migrant workers and the broader community occurs primarily on Thursday and Friday evenings, as migrant workers throughout southern Ontario surge into town to do their shopping and banking. The weekly shopping trip constitutes the most significant social contact between migrant workers and the Canadian community. Local businesses in both communities described friendly interaction with migrant workers, but these encounters are mainly commercial rather than social. Although racialized and racist conceptions of migrant workers coloured interactions with the business community, local merchants welcome the presence of migrant workers and recognize their economic contributions. Many of the sales generated by migrant workers stay in rural communities; the limited mobility of migrant workers constitutes them as a captive market. A recent study estimated migrant workers spend \$82 million in rural communities on goods and services to meet their daily consumption needs but also on purchases they take home (Stevens Associates, 2003). Their importance as a clientele is visibly illustrated in the inventory of grocery stores and convenience shops that stock Caribbean and Mexican ethnic food products and/or other items geared to the migrant agricultural worker population. Migrant workers also spend their earnings in restaurants and bars. Long distance telephone card companies find a substantial market in the migrant community, as does the mobile phone industry. Migrant workers are also important clientele in the second-hand market, especially for bicycles. Benefiting from the migrant population's limited mobility and time constraints, itinerant vendors bring their merchandise to the farm, including phone cards, ethnic foodstuffs, and wire transfer services.

Financial services such as banks, credit unions, and wire transfer companies obtain a significant share of the money migrant workers spend in rural communities. Banks remain a key player amongst the competitors for remittances, but high rates for transferring money are increasing the popularity of wire transfer companies that are expanding their networks throughout Ontario. Since they offer a commission to local agents, a portion of the profits from money transfers stay in rural communities.

Although migrant workers have formed part of the rural population since the late 1960s and make significant economic contributions, as a group they are still denied social membership in the community. One dimension of the social exclusion of migrant workers is physical. On farms hiring migrant labour, workers' accommodations are often concealed behind packing sheds or greenhouses. Attempts by some growers to physically separate migrant workers from the community are accompanied with intentional avoidance by residents. These incidents also took place in the workplace, when customers buying produce on farm did not treat migrant workers as legitimate employees.

While migrant workers perceived that residents held negative perceptions of them, most residents described migrant workers as friendly, hardworking people. Perceptions of migrants as workers often conformed to racial stereotypes. Some residents expressed particular concerns about foreign workers having sexual relationships

with Canadian women. The women who formed relationships with migrant workers were perceived in very negative terms and workers have suffered racially motivated attacks for becoming involved with them.

Despite reports of deliberate avoidance of migrant workers by residents, there were cases where friendships have developed. Friendships provide human contact outside of the working environment and a measure of social support. These relationships help migrant workers exercise rights they are accorded and work to reduce workers' relationships of dependency on their employers. Intimate relationships have also developed between the migrant workers and permanent residents, and some couples have had children. For some workers, relationships formed in Canada had resulted in changes in their migratory status and they had become permanent residents and/or Canadian citizens. Churches constitute one of the key social spaces in which the migrant community and the permanent community form relationships. The longest standing efforts to integrate migrant workers into the community or to see to their needs find their origins in the church, with motivations including evangelism and/or social justice.

In addition to the work of churches, the Province of Ontario has experienced an emergence of groups whose efforts target migrant workers over the last five years. The origins, motivations, and methods of these groups are diverse; their commonality is found in the desire to improve the experience of migrant agricultural workers while they work and live in Canada. Focusing on the study sites but also recording instances of groups in other areas in the province, we identified the following groups. Faith-based groups include the Caribbean Workers Outreach Program and Project El Sembrador, as well as initiatives by local churches throughout the province (St. Vincent de Paul, Vineland Free Christian Reformed Church, Springdale Christian Reform Church, and St. Michael's). Municipal or regional initiatives include Niagara Community Policing, promoting bicycle safety; the Niagara Regional Health Department's Health Bus, offering medical and dental services; and the South Essex Community Centre, involved in a range of activities in 2002. Groups aimed at integrating migrant workers into the broader community include the Latin Immigrant Niagara Community Association (LINCA), Community of Agricultural Foreign Workers and Friends of Exeter (CAFFE), and ENLACE Community Link. Groups with a specific social justice objective were also identified, such as the Global Justice Care Van Project that led to the opening of three migrant worker resource centres by 2003 with funding from the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW) and the Toronto-based Justicia for Migrant Workers. The group with perhaps the longest history is Frontier College, a non-profit organization involved in literacy education that has provided English as Second Language (ESL) training for migrant workers for over 10 years.

Community groups vary widely in their mandates, motivations, and mechanisms for change, but many of the needs they have identified overlap. Firstly, a shared achievement is the provision of an alternative social space for migrant workers outside the farm. Churches provide a place of worship and make efforts to arrange services in Spanish or bring Jamaican ministers to Canada. Along with other groups, churches also host social events, including day trips to tourist attractions. At the margin of the social activities, the presence of faith-based groups and secular organizations on farms through

planned visits or English classes provide some of the only social contact workers receive. Social activities can lead to enhanced integration of migrant workers into the broader community.

In addition to increasing migrant workers' opportunities for social contact, the various groups have improved migrant workers' access to services. Some groups have taken workers shopping, to church, or have organized the distribution of used bicycles, workers' principal mode of transportation. Several groups have made efforts to improve bicycle safety. The provision of English and basic literacy classes is given particular focus by groups working with migrant workers, recognizing the ways in which language barriers pose serious problems in the workplace, in the broader community, and as they seek to defend themselves in their interactions with employers, residents, and government officials. ESL and literacy training is provided primarily through Frontier College and the Migrant Workers Support Centres in Bradford, Simcoe, and Leamington, but also through the churches, Project El Sembrador, and CAFFE.

Other groups play an important role in disseminating resources among the migrant community that raise awareness of their rights and how to exercise them. The Migrant Worker Support Centres have made the most important contributions in this regard. Since workers are reluctant to voice their complaints directly to liaison officers or the Mexican Consulate, some groups have elected to serve as advocates on their behalf. Advocacy ranges from mediating with employers, liaising with the Mexican Consulate or, as UFCW has done, legally challenging the Ontario government. Until greater checks and balances are built into the SAWP, migrant worker advocacy groups will likely play an important role as negotiators.

The efforts of all these groups raise the profile of migrant workers in the consciousness of the immediate community and province-wide. One of the most immediate and significant roles they play is holding accountable the industry, the Canadian government, and the governments of labour-sending countries, to ensure that migrant workers' rights are respected. Some groups believe their effectiveness lies in raising awareness in a non-confrontational stance, while others are in a position to demand legal and institutional changes, such as the UFCW and recent Charter challenges. While some groups have been much more aggressive than others, the mere presence of these groups is a reminder to industry and government that civil society is vigilant.

These groups have also made steps in extending social membership in Canadian society to migrant workers. While the history of civil society's engagement with migrant agricultural workers is fairly nascent, important changes have no doubt occurred in the lives of individual workers and in the broader social group. These organizations, however, reach only a small fraction of the more than 17,000 migrant agricultural workers coming to Ontario each year. Their efforts, while important, are not an adequate long-term measure for meeting the social needs of migrant agricultural workers and facilitating their integration into rural communities. They can provide direction, experience, and insight, but the federal and provincial governments must take more systematic and concerted action at recognizing and meeting the human and social needs

of the tens of thousands of migrant workers complementing the agricultural labour force each year and making key contributions to the Canadian economy.

## **Conclusions**

Migrant agricultural workers coming to Canada often face arduous working conditions. Migrant workers accept long hours in part to compensate for low rates of pay that are subject to a series of deductions and because their social necessity demands it of them. Workers live on property leased or owned by the employer and are subject to a set of farm rules that can impose restrictions on their mobility. The geographical isolation of workers combined with long hours of work leaves them little time to form relationships beyond those they develop with their employers, supervisors, and co-workers.

The social relations that do develop between workers and their employers and the broader community in general are shaped by the characteristics of the SAWP that circumscribe the conditions under which temporary workers are admitted to work in Canada. Within this context, it is not surprising that our research found a range of worker-employer relationships, confirming that in the absence of firmer regulation and enforcement of working and living conditions or expanded rights for farm labour, the human experience of migrant agricultural workers in Canada is largely dependent on the subjective goodwill of the employer.

Migrant agricultural workers have historically experienced social exclusion from the broader rural community, as local residents remain unaware or choose to ignore the migrant community living in their midst. The nature of relationships between the migrant and permanent communities is undergoing small but perceptible transformations as temporary labour assumes increasing relevance in agriculture and burgeoning numbers of migrant agricultural workers come to the province each year. While social interaction between migrant workers and the broader community occurs mainly through commercial interactions, efforts to integrate workers in the broader community have emerged in the last five years. Many of these efforts have come from faith-based and secular groups that offer services to migrant workers and serve as advocates on migrant workers' behalf. These organizations, however, reach only a small fraction of the migrant agricultural workers coming to Ontario each year. Their efforts, while important, are inadequate as a long-term measure for promoting social inclusion of migrant agricultural workers within rural communities.

## **Selected Recommendations**

In light of the findings of this report, the following recommendations have been developed:

### **The Government of Ontario:**

- ★ The Government of Ontario should revise the Occupational Health and Safety Act to include agricultural workers.

- ★ The Government of Ontario should actively recruit Spanish-speaking health professionals for counties employing high numbers of migrant agricultural workers.
- ★ The Government of Ontario should revise the “Ontario Ministry of Health Guidelines on Accommodation for Migrant Farm Workers;” mandate municipal and regional public health inspectors to carry out mid-season inspections of all farms to ensure that the guidelines are being adhered to; and take steps to ensure that the procedures and standards of housing inspectors are harmonized across the province.

**The Government of Canada:**

- ★ The Government of Canada, through HRDC, should review their wage rate methodology and make it accessible to all stakeholders in the SAWP. Within HRDC’s wage rate calculation, the seniority of returning named workers should be recognized, as should the skill levels of workers.
- ★ The Government of Canada, through CCRA and HRDC, should provide information to workers through bilingual workshops and print media on deductions of income tax, CPP, and EI.
- ★ The Government of Canada should review migrant agricultural workers’ contributions to EI premiums and CPP, with the view of exempting migrant agricultural workers from EI deductions and establishing retirement benefits that are more suitable to a temporary, migrant agricultural workforce.
- ★ The Government of Canada should immediately address the issue of involuntary repatriation in consultation with stakeholder groups. It is recommended that current procedures be revised to delay immediate repatriation in order to allow the worker(s) to question the decision through an officially designated representative and have it reviewed. Disputes over repatriation should be heard by an independent dispute resolution body, and workers who have been dismissed unfairly should be transferred to another farm and be allowed to continue in the SAWP.
- ★ The Government of Canada, together with Government of Ontario, should finance workshops and public forums in rural Ontario communities to promote greater awareness between the migrant community and the permanent community. These events should include information regarding the economic and social contributions of the migrant community and promote anti-racist education.
- ★ The Governments of Canada and Ontario should explore avenues for facilitating the transfer of migrant agricultural worker remittances. Finding a solution should be informed by the insights of all stakeholder groups, including Canadian administrators, labour supply country governments, industry representatives, and migrant agricultural workers.
- ★ The Governments of Canada and Ontario should fund initiatives that address the human and social needs of migrant agricultural workers who spend up to eight months each year of their lives working and living in this country. Some of these funds should support the existing Migrant Worker Support Centres that are currently

financed by Canada's unionized employees. New initiatives should be established with the participation of individuals that have experience working with the migrant worker community, such as the organizations mentioned in this report, through a competitive application process.

**Employers and their Representatives:**

- ★ Employers of migrant agricultural workers should provide their workers with health and safety protections and health and safety training.
- ★ Employers of migrant agricultural workers should promptly comply with migrant worker requests for medical attention, and encourage their employees to report health problems immediately.
- ★ Employers of migrant agricultural workers should ensure their migrant workers at least a 40-hour work week and grant them a day of rest after six days of employment. If employees are asked to waive their days of rest in peak production periods, employers should grant another day of rest in no less than six consecutive days.
- ★ Employers of Mexican migrant agricultural workers and their supervisors should pursue Spanish language instruction, as well as provide workplace information in Spanish.
- ★ Employer best practice for housing should accommodate fewer workers in smaller units. Large units lodging a large number of workers can create tensions between workers and do not foster a sense of ownership that more private quarters do. Employer best practice for housing should ensure each worker has his or her own room, supply a stove and a refrigerator for no more than three to four workers, and include a social area separate from eating and sleeping areas.
- ★ Commodity group associations should adopt codes of best practices for the accommodation of migrant agricultural workers and actively promote adoption among their members.
- ★ Foreign Agricultural Resource Management Services (FARMS) in consultation with stakeholder groups, should draw up guidelines for farm rules to be included in the Employer Information Package. Farm rules should list worker rights and responsibilities.
- ★ Employer best practice should not impede workers from engaging in social activities outside of working hours and take care to avoid farm rules that restrict the mobility of their migrant agricultural workers or deny them social contact with the broader community.
- ★ Employers of large numbers of workers should attempt to maintain employee-employer contact and ensure that supervisors receive labour relations training.

**Labour Supplying Country Governments:**

- ★ The Governments of Barbados, Jamaica, the countries of the OECS, and Trinidad and Tobago should review the compulsory savings scheme, with input from Program participants.
- ★ The governments of all labour supply countries should continue their efforts in exploring ways of more effectively transferring workers' savings to their home countries.
- ★ The Government of Mexico should review worker concerns over income tax and allow other firms outside Leamington to apply for the tender.
- ★ The Government of Mexico should review worker concerns over the Royal Bank of Canada Insurance package.
- ★ The governments of all labour supply countries should work collaboratively to create a resource document for workers similar to F.A.R.M.S. Information Package for Employers. This single document could also contain country-specific information.
- ★ The governments of all labour supply countries should properly resource Consulates and Liaison Offices with the view of improving worker representation. Satellite offices should be considered for areas of worker concentration that are distant from Toronto (i.e., Leamington).
- ★ The governments of all labour supply countries should make efforts to recruit workers with agricultural experience, to avoid voluntary repatriations that hold costs for all stakeholders.

**Other Groups:**

- ★ Major banks and credit unions operating in Ontario should consider reducing the fees charged to migrant agricultural workers, keeping their wage levels and economic need in mind, and facilitate their financial transactions in general. Spanish-speaking staff would facilitate the transactions of Mexican workers.

## Positive Features of Existing Relations: Toward a Sustainable Framework

In addition to the recommendations above, this report highlights some positive features of the existing structure of social relations between the three groups of actors – migrant agricultural workers, their employers, and farming community residents – that are worthy of mention and could be considered “best practices.” The following series of features is not exhaustive as it is limited to practices observed or recorded in this study and therefore should be considered together with the recommendations listed above.

### Research Evidence on Good Migrant Worker Employment Practices

- ★ **Hours of work.** Several employers ensured that their Caribbean and Mexican workers received a minimum of 40 hours and one day’s rest per week. Ensuring adequate worker rest is vitally important for the workers’ health and safety and labour productivity quality, and ultimately, the overall productivity of employers’ farming business. It is also important for the consumers of farm produce in terms of food safety and food quality.
- ★ **Housing.** The research documented a few cases in which the employer provided his workers with their own bedrooms, a few cases where two workers shared the same room, and one case where the employer who did not have housing with separate rooms, removed bunk beds at the workers’ request and provided single beds to better accommodate them. Our research also documented the installation of DuraKit “Instant Houses™,” that have individual bedrooms (one per worker), two bathrooms, two kitchens, and a small dining area. There are also cases found of employers who exceeded workers’ expectations by providing them with satellite television in Spanish, furnishings in good condition, air conditioning, and in one case, a separate building for recreation and English-language instruction. These cases point to the fact that not all employers provide poor housing accommodation for their migrant workers. Reasonably good housing accommodation, like health and safety or a healthy and safe working environment translates into increased worker productivity, and hence increased income for those employers who engage in good practices in these and other areas.
- ★ **Medical attention.** Our research finds that there are employers who responded quickly to worker requests for medical attention. In cases of serious illness or accident, these employers waited with their employees in the hospital and ensured they were cared for when recuperating at the farm house. One case was recorded of an employer who hired a Spanish-speaking labourer/teacher who in addition to farm duties, accompanied Mexican workers to obtain medical treatment in their language. The impartiality of this translator as an L/T rather than a supervisor was central to gaining workers’ trust. This kind of good practice undoubtedly has implications for worker productivity, since it also translates into increased worker commitment to employers.
- ★ **Dental care.** Recognizing the cost of dental care in Canada relative to workers’ earnings, the research reported a case where one employer set up a dental plan for the migrant agricultural workers. While this may not be feasible for all employers, others could facilitate worker access to these services and/or the employer could facilitate other employers to allow their workers to use these services.

### **Research Evidence on Employer-Worker Good Personal Relations**

- ★ **Recognition of Workers' Human and Social Needs.** There are some employers who recognize and accept that migrant workers have social needs outside of the immediate farm workplace. These employers take concrete steps to help their workers meet these needs. They facilitate worker movement to and from their farms by purchasing new or used bicycles for their workers and in other cases, licensing a vehicle for them to use. Some employers also provide transport for their workers to attend church or events organized by community groups. In some cases, employers attended these events with their workers. Additionally, clear farm rules were documented that ensured respect for the living arrangements yet did not impose restrictions on worker mobility. Clearly, these employers take a keen interest in the social welfare of their workers, and take concrete actions to help their workers have a good employment experience while in Canada.
- ★ **Attempts to Improve Communication and Cultural Understanding.** Some employers and farms encourage their supervisors take Spanish lessons in order to better communicate with their Mexican workers, while others hire Frontier College students to act as translators and social coordinators. Several employers invited their workers for meals, supported soccer matches, took them to tourist sites, or held parties or barbeques. There are also employers who attempt to better understand workers' cultural frameworks by visiting their employees in their home countries. These efforts will contribute to a safer and more productive work site, strengthen healthy relationships between employers and workers, and enhance workers' experiences of Canada..
- ★ **Family Visits.** There are some employers who encourage and allow migrant agricultural workers with work periods of eight months a chance to visit their families after four months, under a “dual entry” arrangement, while a few others facilitate spousal visits to Canada. While many employers would find the costs of this arrangement prohibitive, it should be commended since it reflects the participating employers' recognition and acceptance of the social and emotional costs migrant agricultural workers face.

### **Research Evidence on Off-Farm Migrant Workers -Rural Canadians Good Social Relations**

- ★ **Friendships.** Many Canadians and permanent residents who reside and work in the migrant agricultural worker dependent communities form friendships with the Caribbean and Mexican migrant workers. These friendship relations provide a significant measure of social support to migrant men and women tethered to the same employer, the same farm, and in the same location by CSAWP policy for up to eight months away from their family and friends at home; and who often face difficulties accessing Canadian services and institutions.
- ★ **Spiritual and Social Outreach and Support.** Several Christian churches run migrant worker outreach programs. These organizations are playing a key role in providing spiritual support for migrant agricultural workers in their own language or through ministers from their country. They provide an alternative social space, which, in some cases, is the site of social events or skills acquisition (ESL). Members of these faith communities have made friends with workers and acted as a source of social support for workers needing medical attention, help with banking, and other personal services. Through their work, churches are also encouraging social inclusion of the migrant worker community among rural Canadians.
- ★ **Commercial Transactions.** In rural communities, local businesses have expanded their product lines to include foods and beverages that are preferred by Mexican and Caribbean workers. While the motivations of most merchants are undoubtedly profit-led, some welcome the migrant worker community for more than the profit motive; they recognize the

workers' social and cultural needs while acknowledging their economic impact. Some banks have adapted their services to meet the needs of migrant agricultural workers, recognizing their particular needs, facilitating their transactions, and reducing fees charged to this relatively low-paid workforce.

- ★ **Responding to Health Needs.** The Niagara Regional Public Health Department's Health Bus is an important resource for migrant agricultural workers living close to the town of Virgil. This resource has provided basic prevention and treatment, including dental care, to those workers able to access the Health Bus on Thursday nights and when a translator is available. In addition, the pager system that has been established by volunteers in the town of Leamington is a practice that, in the short term, should be emulated in other areas as it links workers needing emergency health care with a translator from the community. These types of efforts to include migrant workers in the health care system will undoubtedly impact the well-being and therefore the productivity of workers. It may also have wider implications for public health within the community.
- ★ **Promoting Communication.** Several secular and faith-based groups are making important contributions in improving communication between migrant workers and rural communities. Examples include the consolidation of volunteer translators in Leamington through the pager system (above) available to emergency room staff and the police, and the decade-long efforts of Frontier College to promote English language acquisition among Mexican workers. Efforts such as these bridge communication between migrant workers, their employers, and the broader community and lead to enhanced mutual understanding.
- ★ **Promoting Safety.** Community groups are also making important contributions in promoting bicycle safety among migrant agricultural workers and greater awareness among drivers. These efforts make community roads safer places for both workers and drivers. Events such as these also create social opportunities for migrant workers and rural residents to interact.
- ★ **Promoting Social Inclusion.** Community groups, both secular and faith-based, host social events in an effort to better integrate migrant workers, their employers, and the residents of rural communities. These groups have also provided an alternative social space for workers outside of the farm workplace where they can meet other workers and members of the community. Furthermore, they increase awareness between the two communities which can contribute to improving inter-ethnic social and cultural relations.
- ★ **Promoting Social Justice.** Faith-based and labour advocacy groups are working with employers, workers, and the broader community to promote social justice within the SAWP. The efforts of these groups helps protect workers from unscrupulous and illegal labour practices, and over time, discourage behaviour that could negatively affect the image of Ontario's horticulture producers. The efforts of these groups is also important in increasing communication between community members and migrant workers and, eventually, reducing the racism that is often experienced by new immigrants.