
Temporary Foreign Workers and Canada's Food System

— Natalie Cryderman and Mio
Lainchbury —
August 12 2020

Disclaimer: In this presentation, we use the term temporary foreign workers (TFWs). We would like to acknowledge that these are individual people who are not temporary and have a significant role in our food system. However, for the purposes of this article, TFW is used to refer to these individuals to follow in suit of the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP).

Outline

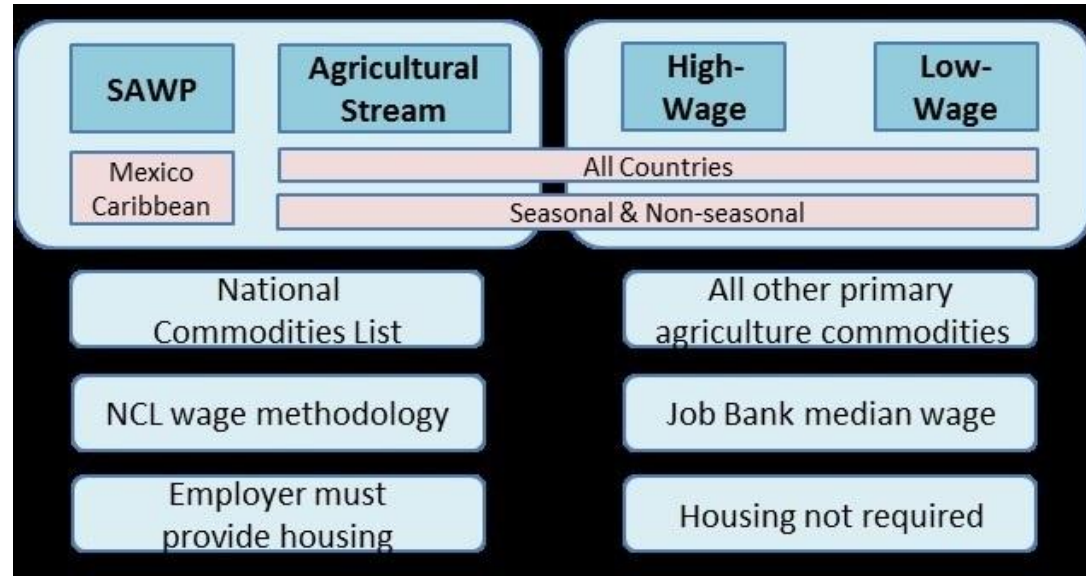
- 1) Primary Agriculture Program
- 2) History of SAWP
- 3) Statistics
- 4) COVID 19
- 5) Social Justice
- 6) Recommendations
- 7) Additional Resources
- 8) References
- 9) Questions

Q & A

Please post any questions in the chat box within Zoom for us to address at the end of the presentation.

Primary Agriculture Stream

- A branch of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program
- Includes 4 different streams through which a TFW can be hired to work in Canada's agriculture sector



(image retrieved from Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019, February 12)

National Commodity List

- apiary products
- fruits, vegetables (including canning/processing of these products if grown on the farm)
- mushrooms
- flowers
- nursery-grown trees including Christmas trees, greenhouses/nurseries
- pedigreed canola seed
- sod
- tobacco
- bovine
- dairy
- duck
- horse
- mink
- poultry
- sheep
- Swine (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2020, July 13)

History of SAWP

- The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) was established in 1966 in response to grower lobbying
- In the first year, 264 individuals from Jamaica were sent to Ontario
- Now includes all 10 Canadian provinces
- B.C. joined in 2004 during which it received 855 TFWs → in 2012, B.C. received almost 5,000 TFWs

SAWP

- Participating countries include Mexico or specific Caribbean countries
- A TFW can be hired for a maximum of 8 months annually
- Employer must provide:
 - **“Minimum of 240 hours of work within a period of 6 weeks or less”**
(Employment and Social Development Canada, 2020, July 13, Overview, para.2).
 - **“Same wages and benefits as those provided to Canadian and permanent resident employees working in the same occupation”**
(Employment and Social Development Canada, 2020, July 13, Wages, working conditions and occupations, para.1)
 - **Round-trip transportation (price included)**
 - **“Adequate, suitable and affordable housing”**
(Employment and Social Development Canada, 2020, July 13, Program Requirements, para.5)
 - **Ensure they register for health insurance**

SAWP

- **Participating country must provide:**
 - Selection and recruitment of workers who meet SAWP requirements
 - Experienced in farming
 - At least 18 years of age
 - Designate representatives who will support the TFW while in Canada

Statistics



Mexico 51.5%

Jamaica 19.5%

Guatemala 15.2%

(Statistics Canada, 2019).



Statistics

- 46,719 workers from SAWP in Canada in 2019
- 8,214 workers from SAWP in B.C. in 2019
- 18% of all SAWP TFWs in Canada were in B.C.
- Okanagan region had 89% of all TFW in B.C.

Statistics

- 89% of TFW's in SAWP from the Caribbean were male
- 11% of TFW's in SAWP from the Caribbean were female
- Average age of TFW in the SAWP is estimated to be around 40 years old

(G Lucas, personal communication, Aug 4, 2020)

A wide-angle photograph of a large agricultural field under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. Numerous workers are seen throughout the field, many carrying large, reddish-brown plastic baskets filled with green cucumbers on their heads. The workers are dressed in casual work clothes, including t-shirts, shorts, and caps. Some are wearing face coverings or headscarves. The field is filled with rows of green plants, likely cucumbers, with some yellow flowers visible. In the background, there are several white vehicles parked, and a tall utility pole stands against the horizon. The overall scene depicts a busy day of harvesting in a rural setting.

Covid 19

Covid 19

“ As economic fallout from COVID-19 will be felt in Canada long after the immediate health crisis, it is reasonable to anticipate that the trend of food insecurity among Canadians will continue”.

(Holland, 2020, para. 12).



Government of Canada enhances Youth Employment and Skills Program to help create new positions for youth in the agriculture sector

From: [Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada](#)

News release

May 26, 2020 – Ottawa, Ontario – Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Canada is taking steps to ensure the resilience of the food supply chain and to provide support to keep the agriculture sector strong. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, today announced an investment of up to \$9.2 million to enhance the Youth Employment and Skills Program (YESP) and fund up to 700 new positions for youth in the agriculture industry.

This additional funding will help the agriculture industry attract Canadian youth, ages 15 to 30, to their organizations to assist with labour shortages brought on by the pandemic. This program aims to provide youth, and particularly youth facing barriers to employment, with job experience in agriculture that will provide career-related work experience.

(Government of Canada, 2020, May 26)

Social Justice

- To us, social justice is the perspective that all people deserve equal opportunities for wealth (economics) , social privileges (politics), and social rights.
- It is important to acknowledge that these workers are made vulnerable by the system, and are not innately vulnerable.
- The program was meant to be on a temporary basis to fill jobs for which qualified Canadians are not available.

Social Justice

1) Lack of transparency around TFW rights

- TFWs are entitled to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, Employment Standards Act, and B.C. Workers Compensation Act
- Known barriers to accessing these rights;
 - Lack of communication from SAWP program to workers
 - Example: Wage deductions
 - Fear of exercising the rights due to risk of losing employment

Social Justice

2) Financial Considerations

- Depending on their contributions, TFWs may or may not be eligible for social programs → EI and CPP
- In most cases, SAWP allows TFWs' families to meet their basic needs. So , many TFWs may rely on returning to SAWP each year.
- However, there may be financial consequences if a worker is unable to return the next season (eg. injury)

Social Justice

3) Potential barriers to submitting a complaint

- Fear of losing their employment since their work permit is tied to one employer (The Conversation, 2020)
- May not have the resources available to file a complaint (i.e. internet access or a phone)
- Language barrier

Social Justice

4) Inconsistent housing conditions

- British Columbia Agriculture Council (BCAC) housing inspection form is required
- Unclear as to who is directly responsible for following up and conducting the housing inspections
 - Government of Canada website states that the **inspections can be done by the “appropriate provincial, territorial or municipal authority” or “an authorized private inspector with appropriate certifications”** (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2020, July 13, Program requirements, para.6)
- Many TFW report unacceptable housing situations
 - Example: 20-30 workers in a 3 bedroom house (University of British Columbia, 2020)

Social Justice

4) Inconsistent housing conditions continued...

- The Government of Canada developed new housing standards in January of 2018 which includes;
 - Having a housing inspection report that is no more than 8 months old
 - Providing proof that all issues listed in the inspection report are addressed prior to hiring TFW's
 - More on site inspections
- Primary Agriculture Review → goal is to standardize housing requirements nationally

Social Justice

5) Food Insecurity

- Lack of access to culturally appropriate foods
- Increased food prices in Canada
- Inconsistent kitchen equipment and storage → leads to reliance on convenient, processed foods
- Limited access to transportation

One mexican worker stated...*“All of us lose weight..., because we work a lot and we don’t eat what we should eat”* (Weiler et al., 2017, p.57).

Social Justice

6) Mental and Physical Health

- In Weiler et al. (2017) study, TFWs commented on +/- weight changes due to emotional stress and lifestyle changes
 - "Male workers report that long working hours – often 10-14 hrs/day (McLaughlin 2009) – prevent them from engaging in sports as often as in their home countries, exacerbating their weight gains." (Weiler et al., 2017, p.57)

"When I get nervous I want to eat. I get this because of tough work, missing Mexico, and problems in the house." (Weiler et al., 2017, p.56)
- Higher rates of physical injuries
- Common health risks:
 - poor ventilation in the workplaces, heavy lifting, agrochemicals, unsafe farm equipment, confined spaces, unsafe transportation, weather extremes, and stress from the lack of social support and cultural dislocation

Social Justice

6) Mental and Physical Health

- Cole et al. (2019) found the following challenges associated with TFWs not accessing proper healthcare
 - Language barriers
 - TFWs' fear of jeopardizing employment
 - Physical distance from healthcare centers and lack of transportation means
 - Limited clinic hours
 - Healthcare providers limited knowledge of TFW's living situation
 - Differences in medical care between Canada and the sending-country

Social Justice

“My children don't really know me. When I came for the first time, I thought it would be for one or two seasons. But now I've come for 6, and things just keep getting worse in Mexico. And my children have grown up without their father. But hey, what option did I have? I could have stayed with them without being able to provide what they needed, or I leave them and I can send them to a better school, buy them better clothes, give them a better life, no?” (Cohen, 2019, pg. 134).

Social Justice- The Positive Side



- Providing migrant workers with their own area in a garden to grow their own fruits and vegetables
- Sharing the fresh produce
- Paying a TFW to cook meals for the entire house
- Offering small group cooking classes and nutrition education (including at community health centers) (Weiler et al., 2017)

The **National Farmers Union (NFU)** claims to support migrant workers and has *“joined calls for regulatory changes so that migrant workers can change jobs without threat of deportation, have full access to healthcare and other employee benefits, and be granted permanent resident status”* (NFU-O, 2020, para.6)

Recommendations by advocates in research, the government and local health authority:

- **The TFW Program should help support temporary foreign agricultural workers' pathway to permanent residence**
- **Changing the temporary workers' visa to allow them to change employers during their SAWP contract**, as they desire, and not be bound to one employer
- **Making the complaint claim more accessible** for TFWs. So far it is only by phone or online, and some of the workers may not have access to the resources required to file an abuse complaint.
- **Providing more bilingual resources to TFWs about "proper food preparation, nutrition, and food safety"** (Weiler et al., 2017, p.58). This could be done in the form of offering cooking classes through community centers.
- **Encouraging more of the positive practices mentioned earlier, such as farm employers sharing their produce with TFWs, or providing a community garden or individual plots**
- **Implementing a minimum housing standard would provide greater consistency in housing requirements, housing inspections, and ultimately in housing conditions for workers.**
- **A recommendation on behalf of Interior Health (IH) is to provide accommodations within the urban containment boundary and near active transportation infrastructure to allow for access to amenities in the community.** Such as health care centres, grocery stores, and community centres.

Additional Resources

- MOSAIC: <https://www.mosaicbc.org/services/settlement/migrant-workers/>
- RAMA (Okanagan Specific) <http://www.ramaokanagan.org/>
- Migrant Workers Alliance for Change <https://migrantworkersalliance.org/>
- Migrant Rights Network <https://migrantrights.ca/>
- Justice For Migrant Workers (J4MW) <https://www.justicia4migrantworkers.org/>
- Migrant Workers Health <http://www.migrantworkerhealth.ca/>
- Fuerza Migrante <https://fuerzamigrante.org/?lang=en>
- United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) <https://www.ufcw1518.com/>
- As well, the following are some researchers who focus on migrant worker health:
 - Anelyse Weiler, Janet McLaughlin, Jenna Hennebry, Donald Cole, Susana Caxaj, Miya Narushima, and Steph Mayell

References

- CBC News. (2020, April 20). *Canadian farmers struggle with labour shortfall due to COVID-19*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/farm-labour-foreign-workers-covid-19-1.5535727>
- CBC News. (2020, June 21). *Mexico to resume sending farm workers to Canada after Covid-19 safety agreement*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/mexico-farm-workers-canada-resume-coronavirus-1.5621668>
- Cohen, Amy. (2019). 'Slavery hasn't ended, it has just become modernized': Border imperialism and the lived realities of migrant farmworkers in British Columbia, Canada. *ACME An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 18 (1): 130–148.
- Cole, D., Mclaughlin, J., Hennebry, J., & Tew, M. (2019). Precarious patients: Health professionals' perspectives on providing care to Mexican and Jamaican migrants in Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program. *Rural and Remote Health*. doi:10.22605/rrh5313
- CTV News. (2020, June 15). *Mexico hits pause on sending temporary foreign workers after COVID-19 deaths*. Retrieved from <https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/mexico-hits-pause-on-sending-temporary-foreign-workers-after-covid-19-deaths-1.4985787>
- Employment and Social Development Canada. (2018). *New Housing Standards to Better Protect Agricultural Temporary Foreign Workers*. Retrieved from https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2018/01/new_housing_standardsbetterprotectagriculturaltemporaryforeignwo.html
- Employment and Social Development Canada (2019, February 12). *What we heard: Primary agriculture review*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/foreign-workers/reports/primary-agriculture.html>
- Employment and Social Development Canada (2019, February 28). *Overhauling the Temporary Foreign Worker Program*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/foreign-workers/reports/overhaul.html>
- Employment and Social Development Canada (2020a, July 7). *Temporary foreign worker program*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/foreign-workers.html>

References

- Employment and Social Development Canada (2020b, July 7). *Hire a temporary foreign agricultural worker*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/foreign-workers/agricultural.html>
- Employment and Social Development Canada (2020, July 13). *Hire a temporary foreign worker through the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/foreign-workers/agricultural/seasonal-agricultural.html>
- Gahman, L., Hjalmarson, E., Bunn, R., Cohen, A., & Terbasket, E. (2015). Race, Food, and Borders: Situating Migrant Struggle in the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 1-6. doi:10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.007
- G Lucas.(2020, August 4). BC Fruit Growers' Association. Personal Communication.
- Government of Canada. (2020, March 27). *Canada provides update on exemptions to travel restrictions to protect Canadians and support the economy*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2020/03/canada-provides-update-on-exemptions-to-travel-restrictions-to-protect-canadians-and-support-the-economy.html>
- Government of Canada. (2020, May 26). *Government of Canada enhances Youth Employment and Skills Program to help create new positions for youth in the agriculture sector*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/agriculture-agri-food/news/2020/05/government-of-canada-enhances-youth-employment-and-skills-program-to-help-create-new-positions-for-youth-in-the-agriculture-sector.html>
- Government of Canada. (2020). *Temporary Foreign Worker Program 2019Q1-2020Q1*. Retrieved from <https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/e8745429-21e7-4a73-b3f5-90a779b78d1e?wbdisable=true>
- Holland, K. (2020, June). Canada's Food Security During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *The School of Public Policy*, 13:13. Retrieved from <https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Food-Security-Holland.pdf>

References

J Worboys. (2020, August 7). Interior Health. Personal Communication.

Migrant Worker Health. (N.D). *Health Risks and Issues*. Retrieved from <http://www.migrantworkerhealth.ca/HealthRisks.html>

Ministry of Health. (2020, June 05). Are you Eligible? Retrieved August 4, 2020, from <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/health-drug-coverage/msp/bc-residents/eligibility-and-enrolment/are-you-eligible#others>

NFU-O (2020). *NFU-O Statement on the Deaths of Two Migrant Farm Workers*. Retrieved from <https://www.nfu.ca/nfu-o-statement-on-the-death-of-bonifacio-eugenio-romero/>

Statistics Canada (2019, July 8). *Agricultural sector workers from the Temporary Foreign Workers Program 2015*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/190708/dq190708a-eng.htm>

The Conversation. (2020, June 18). *Newcomers are on the fault lines of Canada's social safety net and food systems*. Retrieved from https://theconversation.com/newcomers-are-on-the-fault-lines-of-canadas-social-safety-nets-and-food-systems-137974?fbclid=IwAR3k_9A6W9dnFbOYpPlptGglBwfP45tz3eXMzmkVXvEEEs0_NpAL_9YIDq0

The Globe and Mail (2020). *Ottawa didn't enforce rules for employers of migrant farm workers during pandemic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-how-ottawas-enforcement-regime-failed-migrant-workers-during-the/>

University of British Columbia. (2020). *Essential Labour, Essential Lives: Migrant Agricultural Workers and COVID-19 [Zoom Webinar]*. https://ubcfarm.ubc.ca/essential-labour-essential-lives-migrant-agricultural-workers-and-covid-19/?fbclid=IwAR2C-s8GnsbFPkpf117QPloo_hCLziKtgGkPkrW6G5kwJ18kohEYjAtWkQ0

Weiler, A.M., McLaughlin, J. and Cole, D.C. (2017). Food Security at Whose Expense? A Critique of the Canadian Temporary Farm Labour Migration Regime and Proposals for Change. *Int Migration*, 55: 48-63.

Welcome B.C. (2020). *Know Your Rights as a Temporary Foreign Worker*. Retrieved from <https://www.welcomebc.ca/Work-or-Study-in-B-C/Work-in-B-C/Know-Your-Rights-as-a-Temporary-Foreign-Worker>

The image features a teal background with a grid of lighter teal circles. A diagonal line splits the image from the top-left to the bottom-right. The top-left portion is white, and the bottom-right portion is teal with the circle pattern. A vertical teal line is positioned to the left of the text.

Thank you!

Questions and Discussion
