

**The Role of Housing in the Integration and Wellbeing of Foreign  
Labour in the Canadian Agri-Food Sector: Experiences of Mexican  
Seasonal Agricultural Workers in Canada**

by

William Louis Helps

A Thesis

presented to

The University of Guelph

In partial fulfilment of requirements  
for the degree of

Master of Science

in

Rural Planning and Development

Guelph, Ontario, Canada

© William Louis Helps April 2020

## **ABSTRACT**

### THE ROLE OF HOUSING IN THE INTEGRATION AND WELLBEING OF FOREIGN LABOUR IN THE CANADIAN AGRI-FOOD SECTOR: EXPERIENCES OF MEXICAN SEASONAL AGRICULTURAL WORKERS IN CANADA

William Louis Helps

Advisor:

University of Guelph, 2020

Dr. Ryan Gibson

The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program is a major component of Canada's agricultural labour pool which has gained academic attention due largely to concerns over the exploitation and poor mental and physical health outcomes of migrant workers. It has been suggested by multiple authors that the housing provided to workers, which is often on farm properties in rural areas, could be part of the problem, yet there has been little in-depth research about the effects of various housing arrangements. This thesis presents the results of an investigation into these effects through a series of key informant interviews with Mexican Seasonal Agricultural Workers. It presents findings that workers who live further from settlements have poorer ability to access services by themselves and are more socially isolated, but also that this largely depends on the willingness of employers to recognize and respond to their needs.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis paper is dedicated to the thousands of migrant workers who come to Canada every year through the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program. Some of them were kind enough to share their stories with me and for that I am forever grateful. The opportunity they gave me to learn about their lives, not only in Canada but in their home towns in Mexico, was a truly special experience.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to acknowledge the efforts of my academic advisor at the University of Guelph, Dr. Ryan Gibson, and my host supervisor at the *Universidad Autonoma del Estado de México*, Dr. Lidia Carvajal. Both provided essential guidance in every stage of this project and are the reason for its success. I also thank Dr. Dave Guyadeen for being a part of my thesis committee and providing thoughtful and constructive feedback on several drafts of this document.

My field research in Mexico benefitted from the assistance of several people along the way. For their assistance in connecting me with the participants of this study, I thank Luis Manuel Zimbrón and Olga Baca Tavira at the *Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social*. Thank you also to my friends Román and Michelle and their families for hosting me and introducing me to further participants.

This project was funded by a Globalink Research Award provided by Mitacs and a Rural Planning Travel Grant provided by the University of Guelph.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements .....	iv
Table of Contents .....	v
List of Abbreviations and Nomenclature .....	x
List of Appendices .....	xi
Introduction .....	1
1.1 Problem Statement.....	1
1.2 Research Questions .....	2
1.3 Research Objectives.....	4
1.4 Structure of Thesis.....	4
1.5 Summary.....	5

2	Literature Review .....	7
2.1	Introduction to the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program .....	7
2.2	The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program in the Canadian Agri-Food Sector	8
2.3	Agricultural Migrant Labour as a Global Trend .....	13
2.4	Impacts of The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program in Sending Countries	16
2.5	Structural Inequality and the Conditions of Seasonal Agricultural Workers ....	20
2.6	Seasonal Agricultural Workers in Rural Communities.....	22
2.7	Housing in the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program .....	24
2.8	Summary.....	26
3	Methods.....	28
3.1	Research Design .....	28
3.2	Key Informant Selection .....	29
3.3	Interview Process .....	33
3.4	Analytical Techniques.....	35

3.4.1	Field Observation Analysis.....	35
3.5	Limitations.....	36
3.6	Summary.....	36
4	Findings.....	38
4.1	Housing Arrangements for Seasonal Agricultural Workers.....	38
4.2	Access to Services.....	42
4.2.1	Health Services.....	43
4.2.2	Migrant Worker Support Centres.....	46
4.2.3	Consular Services.....	47
4.3	Non-Working Hours.....	48
4.4	Socialization and Isolation.....	51
4.4.1	Relationships with Other Seasonal Agricultural Workers.....	51
4.4.2	Communication with Families.....	52
4.4.3	Socialization with Canadians.....	54

4.5	Relationships with Employers .....	56
4.6	Summary.....	61
5	Analysis .....	63
5.1	The Role of Housing Arrangements in Seasonal Agricultural Workers’ Integration .....	63
5.2	The Role of Housing Arrangements in Seasonal Agricultural Workers’ Health and Wellbeing .....	65
5.2.1	Location and Access to Services.....	65
5.2.2	The Quality and Size of Living Spaces.....	67
5.3	The Importance of Employers to Seasonal Agricultural Workers’ Experience	69
5.4	The Priorities of Mexican Migrant Farm Workers .....	71
5.5	Summary.....	75
6	Implications and Recommendations.....	77
6.1	For Government.....	77
6.2	For Employers.....	81



6.3	For Public Service Providers .....	82
6.4	For Rural Communities.....	83
6.5	For Advocates.....	84
6.6	For Academia.....	85
6.7	Summary.....	87
7	Reflections on the Project.....	89
7.1	Pre-Conceived Notions and the Need for Adaptable Thinking .....	90
7.2	The Challenges and Opportunities of Fieldwork in Rural Mexico .....	93
7.3	Summary.....	98
8	Conclusion.....	100
	Bibliography .....	102
	Appendix I: REB Certificate .....	116
	Appendix II: Prepared Questions (Spanish) .....	117
	Appendix III: Prepared Questions (English Translation) .....	120

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND NOMENCLATURE

### Abbreviations:

LMIA – Labour Market Impact Assessment

SAW – Seasonal Agricultural Worker

SAWP – Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program

STyPS – *Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social*

TFW – Temporary Foreign Worker Program

### Nomenclature:

Managed migration – a variety of government programs intended to secure sector-specific migrant labour

Migrant Worker – any person who participates in the workforce of a country other than their own; not necessarily a SAW.

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

Appendix I: Research Ethics Certificate

Appendix II: Prepared Questions (Spanish)

Appendix II: Prepared Questions (English Translation)

# Introduction

## 1.1 Problem Statement

This thesis examines concerns for the wellbeing of workers in the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), a vital source of labour for the Canadian agri-food sector. As understood through the human rights-based analysis of Hennebry & Preibisch (2012), the SAWP fails to protect the rights of migrant workers, as it limits their ability to reject unsafe or unfair living and working conditions. In response to these failures, it has even been suggested that migrant labour programs such as the SAWP are inherently exploitative and should be abolished as a practice (Binford, 2019). Simultaneously, it is recognized that the SAWP forms an essential source of financial stability and upward mobility for low-income rural families in source countries (Carvajal & Johnson, 2016) and that eliminating this lifeline would only worsen the situation of these families (Weiler & McLaughlin, 2019). The difficulty in reconciling the positive impacts of this program with its problematic human rights record is the starting point for the inquiry of this thesis. It is understood that in order to improve the situation of Seasonal Agricultural Workers (SAWs), we must seek ways to change practices within the SAWP such that it allows workers to access their rights and take part in public life in the rural communities where they reside during their time in Canada. In this thesis, I investigate ways in which the housing arrangements provided by their employers in the program affect the well-being of Mexican SAWs, based on

information obtained in key informant interviews. This investigation is premised on the assertions of several authors (Basok, 2002; Otero & Preibisch, 2016; Preibisch, 2010) that the geographic isolation of much housing provided to SAWs plays a central role in the power relations between them and their employers, with consequences for their physical and mental health and their ability to assert their rights. Despite these previous claims, there has not yet been any in-depth research directly focused on the impact of housing arrangements on SAWs' experience and wellbeing in Canada. This thesis was designed to fill this gap in the literature.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

The aim of this thesis is to understand how housing arrangements for SAWs can be optimized to improve their access to health care and social services, establish more equal power relationships with their employers, and create better integration of these migrants into their host communities in Canada. The central research question of this study is: does housing workers in geographically remote on-farm housing negatively impact their access to services, ability to integrate with rural communities, autonomy from their employer, and general well-being in Canada? It is hypothesized that workers housed in remote locations will report poorer experiences in each of these areas. Given the complexity and wide scope of this topic, the following open-ended sub-questions have

been identified to help guide my inquiry into the relationship between housing arrangements and SAWs' experiences in Canada:

- What kinds of housing are being offered to SAWs?
- How does the location of housing affect workers' interaction with government officials from their home country? Do workers living in more remote locations have less interaction with their own government?
- What is the role of housing in determining what workers do in their non-working hours? Do workers living on-farm have less ability to leave on their own? Is the housing they are provided a suitable space for rest and recreation?
- How does housing affect socialization between workers? What problems commonly arise among workers when living together?
- How does the location of housing change the way that workers interact with rural communities in Canada? Are workers living in a populated area more likely to form connections within their host community?
- How does the location of their housing shape relationships and power dynamics between workers and employers? Do employers who house workers in isolated areas exploit this situation in order to gain excessive control over workers? Do workers in closer proximity to populated areas have a better ability to assert their rights?

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The purpose of this thesis is to provide insights into the role of housing in the wellbeing and integration of SAWs in Canadian rural communities. As described above, there is evidence that a substantial number of SAWs face substandard living and working conditions, social isolation, and vulnerability to exploitation. It is my intention that the information gained from this study will help to illuminate ways to improve the situation of SAWs so that they may have better access to their rights and to support systems during their time in Canada. From the analysis of my key informant interviews with SAWs, I will provide implications and recommendations for each of the following stakeholder groups: Canadian and Mexican governments, agri-food employers, service providers (including healthcare professionals and migrant worker support centres), rural communities and municipalities, migrant worker advocates, and academia, including recommendations for further study on this topic.

### **1.4 Structure of Thesis**

This thesis is organized into eight chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of the current literature on the SAWP, focusing on various aspects relevant to this study but particularly on the living conditions and housing of SAWs. Chapter 3 outlines the methods employed for this study, describing the process through which interview participants were selected and the analysis applied to the

contents of these interviews, as well as relevant theory of qualitative analysis. Chapter 4 presents the key findings that emerged from key informant interviews, with a focus on answering the research questions posed in Section 1.2. Chapter 5 contains my interpretation of this data, distilling the information presented in Chapter 4 down to several key insights. Chapter 6 presents implications and recommendations for each of the key stakeholder groups identified in Section 1.3. In Chapter 7 I offer my own personal reflections and commentary on the project, describing the process of qualitative research involving Mexican SAWs in their home country, which may prove helpful to other researchers starting in this field. Finally, Chapter 8 concludes this thesis, summarizing its contents and key takeaways.

## **1.5 Summary**

This study has been conducted in order to better understand the role of housing and geographic location in SAW well-being and integration. It will explore questions of how isolation from the rural communities in which they live impacts access to services, freedom of non-working hours, and power dynamics with employers, as well as other aspects of migrants' lives in Canada. These questions have the potential to reveal profound implications about how rural stakeholders from government to employers to rural communities can work to better the conditions of migrant farm workers and move towards a more fair and humane future for the program. This thesis paper will offer



reflections on not only the outcomes of the research but also the process of fieldwork involving migrant workers, making it of value to a wide variety of audiences including government, employers, service providers, advocates of migrant workers, and academic researchers. This value stems from its implications for both practice and theory concerning the integration of migrant farm workers.

## **2 Literature Review**

This chapter provides a review of the existing academic literature related to the SAWP where it is relevant to contextualizing and understanding this study. It has been divided into five sections. First, I provide a brief overview of the SAWP. Subsequent sections will explore the effects of the SAWP in Canada, in sending countries, and for workers themselves. Finally, I turn to the literature on SAWP housing specifically to explain pre-existing knowledge that informed this thesis. Each of these sections will contribute to an understanding of both the value and the controversy of the SAWP, and ultimately, why it is important to explore questions regarding the improvement of the wellbeing of SAWs.

### **2.1 Introduction to the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program**

The SAWP is a migrant labour program based on a collection of bilateral agreements between Canada and the governments of Mexico and various countries. Starting in 1966 as an arrangement between Canada and multiple Caribbean countries, the program has gradually expanded in the number of migrant workers and the number of countries from which they are recruited over the past five decades (Preibisch, 2011). Under the arrangement established by these agreements, Canadian employers in the agri-food sector can request workers from sending countries to fill positions lasting between six weeks and eight months of the year. Workers are recruited by their own governments and assigned to an individual employer who has been granted access to the program. Upon

completion of their contracts, SAWs are required to return to their home countries, after which they may reapply to return to the program the following year. Workers are entitled to transportation to and from Canada as well as housing throughout their stay, paid for by their employer. Additionally, while in the program they are entitled to public health care and eventually the Canada Pension Plan, to which they contribute through pay deductions.

## **2.2 The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program in the Canadian Agricultural Sector**

The need for an agricultural migrant labour program in Canada arises primarily from widespread shortages of agricultural workers which have developed over the course of decades. A 2017 study on the ongoing agricultural labour shortage in Canada shows that in that year there were approximately 69,000 positions in the sector which could not be filled with Canadian residents, a number which is expected to increase to 123,000 over the next decade (CAHRC, 2019). While most of these positions were filled with migrant workers through either the SAWP or the Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) Agricultural Stream<sup>1</sup>, a remaining pool of 16,500 unfilled positions led to an estimated \$2.9 billion in

<sup>1</sup> The TFW is another Canadian managed migration program that contains various streams to serve different sectors, one of which is agriculture. Given that there are substantially different rules between the TFW and SAWP, particularly concerning housing (Government of Canada, 2019b), workers in the TFW program were not a part of this investigation.

lost sales (CAHRC, 2019). Ontario accounts for over half of these vacancies and correspondingly is also the most common destination for migrant farm workers, who make up 23% of the provincial agricultural workforce (CAHRC, 2014a). The labour shortage is especially pronounced in Ontario's large horticultural sub-sector (CAHRC, 2014b), which has had limited ability to take advantage of labour-saving automation technology (VRIC, 2017). Not coincidentally, the Ontario horticultural sub-sector has become closely associated with the SAWP, particularly in the Leamington area, which is as well-known for its large SAW population as it is for its greenhouses (Basok, 2002). Labour shortages and the need for the SAWP, as the primary means of bringing foreign labourers into the Canadian agri-food sector, are therefore intrinsically entwined. As the agricultural labour gap continues to grow, the SAWP can be expected gain increasing importance to both government and industry leaders in Ontario and Canada as a whole.

The SAWP is now seen by some as an essential aspect of the Canadian agri-food sector and has been repeatedly demonstrated to have a large financial impact on both the sector and on rural communities. In 2014, an evaluation of the program's impact on the Ontario horticultural sub-sector found that it generated an additional \$5.4 billion in revenue (Mussell, 2015). Surveys of agricultural employers have found that the program contributes to the profitability of farms varying in scale from under \$99,000 to over \$2 million in annual production. The increased viability that these farms gain from access to seasonal labour provides security for over 180,000 Canadian jobs in the agri-food sector

(CAHRC, 2017). The disappearance of this labour source would therefore be a severe setback for Canadian agri-food employers and their communities.

The Canadian agri-food sector's labour challenge stems directly from demographic trends affecting rural communities across the country. As a whole, over time, Canada's population has trended more urban, and rural communities have aged and declined in comparison to cities. Over the course of Canada's history, census data shows a long, steady decline in the share of the national population living in rural areas<sup>2</sup>, which fell from 87% in 1851 to 19% in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2018a). Simultaneously, rural populations have seen increases in the average age of their residents as young people increasingly choose to pursue education and work elsewhere (Bakhtiar, 2015; Statistics Canada, 2018b). In addition to the decline of rural populations relative to their urban counterparts, Canadians increasingly commute an hour or longer, including many Canadians who live in a rural area but work in a city (Statistics Canada, 2019). All of these factors have taken a toll on a wide range of rural employers, who express difficulty in finding employees as more and more rural residents exit the local workforce, leaving vacancies in not just low-skilled but also high-skilled positions such as healthcare providers (Rourke, 2005; Wulff et al, 2008). Furthermore, it has apparently affected the

<sup>2</sup> The Statistics Canada data cited uses a census rural definition, meaning places with a population of less than 1000 people.

viability of family-run farming operations. Increasingly, family farms do not have established succession plans, a reflection of the choice being made by many children of farmers to pursue employment elsewhere rather than continue the family business (Lobley et al, 2010). Exacerbating this difficulty is the ever-expanding size of farms in this country, which in recent decades have undergone a consolidation process (Magnan, 2015; Rotz et al, 2019). As farmers lose the ability to depend on family-members for help and find themselves responsible for larger quantities of land, their need for hired labour increases. The issue is further compounded by a popular belief among Canadians that agricultural jobs are unappealing, given their generally low compensation, high difficulty, and seasonality (CAHRC, 2019). As a result, it appears increasingly unlikely that domestic<sup>3</sup> workers can be enticed to fill the sector's growing number of vacancies.

The SAWP offers a highly effective stop-gap to this problem. The program has been held up as an exemplary managed migration program in part because it is able to consistently offer agricultural employers access to the workers they need. As noted in Mussell (2015), it is regarded as a premium program. It does not offer any cost savings to employers. In fact, with the associated costs of housing and transportation of migrants, it costs considerably more than it would to hire domestic workers. They are willing to pay

<sup>3</sup> "Domestic" in this context referring to current citizens and permanent residents of Canada.

higher costs, however, given the highly dependable and flexible nature of these employment relations. The ability to bring in additional workers during limited periods of high productivity, such as during a harvest, allows them to respond dynamically to the increasingly global economic pressures of the agricultural market (Budworth et al., 2017). For these reasons, the SAWP has become embedded in the Canadian agricultural sector as an essential component of its workforce, as employers increasingly come to rely upon it. Finally, facing this demand for migrant labour in the agricultural sector, the SAWP reduces the incentive to hire illegal immigrants, ensuring that workers have access to certain rights and protections, and contracts guaranteeing payment for their work. Basok (2002) notes that many SAWs compare their conditions favourably with those of illegal migrant workers in the United States, for example, with one migrant explaining the distinction that in Canada they can “live like humans” (p. 98), given their access to basic rights and comforts. Therefore, the SAWP provides a legal route for the migrant labour that the agricultural sector needs which theoretically guarantees a certain level of protection for workers, allowing it to be compared favourably with other, less-regulated forms of migrant labour. Nonetheless, certain realities of the experiences of SAWs complicate this idea, as will be explained in Section 2.5.

## **2.3 Agricultural Migrant Labour as a Global Trend**

The labour shortages affecting the Canadian agricultural sector are far from unique to this context. Parallels can be drawn in many countries across the Global North, where similar trends of urbanization are driving rural labour shortages. According to Nettle (2018), agricultural labour shortages have become a trend “shared by most industrial nations” (p. 8), as they deal with the same challenges of demographic change that have affected Canada. Young people in these countries appear to be widely disinterested in agricultural jobs. Researchers in the United Kingdom, in a study about the sources of their own agricultural labour shortage, found that these jobs are perceived as undesirable, due to both their low compensation and an idea that they lack prestige (Devlin, 2016). These challenges are also found in many parts of the European Union (Rye & Scott, 2018), Australia (Binks et al, 2016), and New Zealand (Grimmond et al., 2014; Lovelock & Leopold, 2008). In many countries faced with this problem, migrant worker programs have become a standard practice. They can now be found in a wide variety of industrialized countries as part of a growing resurgence in managed migration, policies which are designed to harness immigration to provide labour for specific economic sectors (Castles, 2006). These policies are seen as attractive by many Western countries due to their promise to “add temporary workers to the labor force without adding permanent residents to the population” (Martin, 2006, p. 2). Managed migration rose to prominence in the post-World War II era in several countries in Europe and North America before mostly being



abandoned by the 1980s (Menz, 2008). Notably, the SAWP is one of the few managed migration policies from this era to survive, as it started in 1966 and has since continued uninterrupted. In recent decades, however, other countries have begun to explore managed migration programs as a workforce development option once again (Rye & Scott, 2018). Germany has revived its *Gastarbeiter* programs of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Ellermann, 2014). Norway recruits Eastern European workers to fill their agricultural labour shortage (Rye, 2014). New Zealand and Australia have each made use of temporary migration from other Pacific nations, through the Recognized Seasonal Employer scheme and the Seasonal Workers Program, respectively (Brickenstein & Tabucanon, 2013; MacDermott & Opeskin, 2010; Tipples, 2017). In other cases, countries have shown a willingness to allow private companies to seek their own migrant labour solutions. Both Finland and Sweden have taken to importing workers from Southeast Asia to harvest their lucrative wild berry crops through entrepreneurial working visas (Martin & Prokkola, 2017). Olive growers in Spain have become dependent upon a steady flow of workers from North Africa and Latin America, some of whom enter through official government programs while others are brought in illegally (Plewa & Miller, 2005). While these examples do not properly fit within the definition of managed migration used in this paper, they illustrate the ways in which agricultural employers have been permitted to seek their own foreign workforce, with government often helping them or at least not impeding these efforts.

The fact that migrant worker programs have become such a popular solution to agricultural labour shortages serves to illustrate two main points. First, it demonstrates that the importance of this issue is not limited to Canada but is in fact global in scale. Migrant worker programs merit serious consideration because they are quickly becoming the new normal for agricultural sectors across the world. Secondly, it allows for an exploration of the common problems that result from these programs and criticisms that emerge in response. Migrant worker programs in many jurisdictions have become associated with exceedingly dangerous and unhealthy working conditions (Moyce & Schenker, 2018). Examples of worker mistreatment abound in a variety of contexts, with or without direct government oversight. In both Finland's and Sweden's berry-picking industries, where migration has been mostly driven by berry companies recruiting workers from Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries with little government involvement, there have been numerous cases of human trafficking, including indentured servitude of workers who could not pay off their debts to their employers (Jokinen & Ollus, 2013; Martin & Prokkola, 2017). Similar evidence has emerged from Spain, where the illegal or semi-legal status of many foreign workers have left them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse (Plewa & Miller, 2005). Even in contexts that supposedly involve greater oversight, however, severe problems can occur. In Australia, for example, where migrant workers are officially protected by the same labour codes as citizens, Underhill & Rimmer (2015) find that their social isolation and the threat of deportation result in "layered vulnerability"

(p. 622), meaning that they are potentially more exposed to exploitation and danger than their domestic counterparts. These cases all seem to form a pattern, one which has been noted in the literature. As Ruhs & Martin (2008) explain, these migrant worker programs seem to inevitably sacrifice the rights typically afforded to immigrants in exchange for greater government control. As will be explained later in this chapter, the SAWP is no exception to this pattern. What this serves to illustrate, however, is the need for better practices in agricultural migrant labour. These programs have become and are set to continue to be a major part of the agricultural workforce in many industrialized countries. In order to achieve better outcomes for migrant workers, the factors that lead to their marginalization need to be addressed through reform.

## **2.4 Impacts of The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program in Sending Countries**

The SAWP is not a single policy but rather a collection of bilateral agreements negotiated between Canada and each sending country. It is therefore worth examining its effects in workers' home countries, as this helps to understand their own governments' role in program administration, as well as the factors compelling people to migrate to Canada in the first place.

In the SAWP's partner countries, including Mexico, the program serves as an important source of revenue for workers, their families, and their communities. This

primarily occurs through remittances, which are portions of their wages sent home to their families. For practically all SAWs, this is their primary motivation for joining the program, as the earnings they collect in a few months of work can be considerably higher than the salaries they would earn if they had stayed, one study finding the average total transfer amount over the course of a season to be 2.2 times the minimum annual salary in Mexico (Binford, 2006), an amount which has likely increased considerably given increases in Canadian wages over the past decade. Academic opinions on the development potential of these remittances vary. Carvajal and Johnson (2016) report that respondents to their survey of Mexican SAWs had a variety of uses for their earnings. While a substantial portion of remittances typically go towards basic subsistence, SAWs' families also were able to invest this money in many cases, including into their homes, farming operations, other sources of income, and even their children's post-secondary education. Remittances are vital to many of these families, most of whom have only small parcels of land in Mexico for subsistence farming and depend on multiple alternative income sources to survive (Verduzco, 2007). Basok (2002) reports many workers being motivated by situations of extreme poverty to take part in the program. Wells et al. (2014) emphasize the role of remittances in subsistence for low-income rural families in sending countries, going so far as to call them "literally a lifeline to transnational family survival" (p. 144). They found that this income source greatly eases the burden of housing, education, and food, among other things, though they claim that remittances are not sufficient to truly lift

these families out of poverty. Binford (2006) found that in the average worker's first five seasons in the program, most money goes into paying off household debts, but after six seasons, they begin to make purchases including cars, electronics, and more expensive food for their families. While Binford points out that this results in SAWs and their families becoming accustomed to a more expensive lifestyle which can only be sustained through further enrolment in the program, it can also be viewed as a substantial improvement in quality of life. While it appears inconclusive whether income from the SAWP can actually bring people out of poverty or merely ease the burden of it, in either case it forms a vital financial support for SAWs and their dependents. SAWs therefore have a strong incentive to continue with the program as it presents an opportunity that often does not exist for them in their home communities.

In 2012, the total of all SAWP remittances to Mexico was \$174.1 million (Wells et al., 2014), a figure which will likely have increased since then due to greater numbers of Mexican workers being requested every year. While this number is dwarfed by remittances sent home by Mexican migrant farm workers in the United States, it is substantial considering the context of SAWs' home communities. SAWs are recruited mostly from rural areas, as residents of state capitals are not eligible for the program. Many of the communities they come from see little outside investment, making remittances from even a few SAWs a substantial influx of wealth. While this wealth certainly has positive implications for development in these communities, it is not always

viewed in this way. Reed (2008), for example, sees it as a form of “neocolonial relationship” (p. 484), in which Canada exercises undue influence through this economic incentive. Regardless of how this wealth redistribution is framed, it clearly provides the Mexican government, as well as the governments of other sending countries, with a compelling motivation to work to ensure their continued participation in the program. By nature of the program’s structure<sup>4</sup>, sending countries are unofficially in competition with each other to secure as many spots for their workers as possible. This is a feature that Basok (2002) argues discourages sending countries from supporting the rights of the workers they send, as they want to be seen as compliant partners so as to secure more spots in the next year. In fact, Satzewich (2008) argues that the addition of Mexico to the program in 1974 was partly motivated by a desire to gain leverage in negotiations with Caribbean partners, though it was also a response to existing illegal migrant labour from Mexico at the time. Whether or not competition between sending countries is an intended outcome, it is clear that the governments of these countries value the program and take steps to involve themselves in its success. The Mexican government, in particular, has taken on considerable responsibility for the program (Hennebry, 2008), perhaps best exemplified by the presence of a Mexican consulate in the town of Leamington, home to less than 28,000 people but a large portion of the Ontario horticultural industry. The

<sup>4</sup> Referring to the bilateral agreements negotiated with each sending country. This arrangement allows for the number of workers requested from each country to be changed from year to year.

administration of the SAWP is therefore a priority for both the Canadian government and the governments of sending countries. As such, recommendations for both of these parties will be included at the conclusion of this thesis.

## **2.5 Structural Inequality and the Conditions of Seasonal Agricultural Workers**

As was mentioned above, the SAWP has become an object of much debate and, in many cases, condemnation in academic circles, as well as among workers' and migrants' rights advocates in Canada. The arguments against the program range from somewhat abstract discussions about the inherent unethicallity of migrant worker programs to reports of real, specific abuses against SAWs. In general, however, most criticisms stem from a structural inequality that appears to be built into the program itself.

Basok (2002) provides a compelling explanation of this structural inequality, describing how Mexican SAWs are controlled through various means, including selection criteria that prioritizes workers with families they will have to return to, Mexican government involvement in the repatriation of workers who displease their employers, and isolation from their host communities in Canada due to language and cultural barriers. A similar assessment is reached by Hennebry and Preibisch (2012), who dispute the SAWP's reputation as a managed migration best practice through a human rights-based lens. In particular, they criticize the restrictions that for much of the program's history

prevented workers from changing employers<sup>5</sup>, preventing mistreated workers from seeking a better position for themselves. In another article, Preibisch (2010) explains how the program provides agricultural employers with excessive control over their workforce. These employers can manipulate migrants through their ability to request workers of specific nationalities and sexes, allowing them to coerce subservience through a fear of replacement. Another frequently cited concern is the lack of a path to citizenship for SAWs<sup>6</sup>, meaning that no matter how many years they participate in the program, they are always at risk of loss of employment and repatriation (Gabriel & MacDonald, 2011; Otero & Preibisch, 2016). These features of the program, it is argued, place SAWs in a precarious position where they will be more willing to accept unfair treatment and poor working and living conditions out of fear of being sent home or even barred from future participation in the program, which, as explained above, is an essential financial support for their families.

This assessment is supported by scholarly literature presenting evidence that many SAWs experience mistreatment at the hands of their employers, as well as a variety of negative health outcomes directly and indirectly associated with their work. Multiple

<sup>5</sup> This restriction was lifted in 2019, though, given how recent this development is, it is as yet unclear to what degree workers will now be able to easily change between employers (Government of Canada, 2019a).

<sup>6</sup> This too may be in the process of changing, as there is a recently announced pilot project which will provide a path to permanent residency for temporary foreign workers in agri-food jobs (Gowling, 2019).



studies have found that despite being legally entitled to public medical care throughout their stay in Canada, many SAWs do not receive adequate medical attention and as a result suffer from a variety of physical and mental health conditions (Preibisch & Hennebry, 2011; Hennebry et al., 2015). Fear of repatriation should they refuse unsafe labour or complain of poor health has been found to cause them to routinely subject themselves to unsafe working conditions and continue to work when ill or injured (Cajax & Cohen, 2019; Hennebry et al., 2015; Hennebry & Williams, 2015). Workers have also been found to suffer from social isolation. This is partially due to separation from their families, who are not allowed to join them, a detail differentiating the SAWP from other Canadian working visas and immigration programs. The intended effect from the perspective of the Canadian government is to compel workers to return to their country of origin at the end of their contract. However, the consequence of this policy, according to McLaughlin et al. (2018) is the estrangement of workers from their spouses and children both during their stay in Canada and at home.

## **2.6 Seasonal Agricultural Workers in Rural Communities**

SAWs form an important component of many rural communities in Canada, not only due to their implications for local labour markets and economies, but also because they are a part of the communities they reside and work in, though they are seldom recognized as such. In some communities, the number of SAWs can even rival that of citizens and

permanent residents in peak farming seasons, causing noticeable changes to the local cultural landscape. The most prominent example of this is Leamington, where the large migrant farm worker population drawn to its greenhouses has generated an entire industry of restaurants, grocers, and other services catering to Mexican and Caribbean tastes (Basok, 2002). According to Bauder et al. (2002), the program produces both economic and social changes in rural communities. As they write, “the importance of this clientele to local retailers ... is visibly illustrated in the inventory of grocery stores and variety shops that now stock coconut milk, tortillas and chipotle peppers” and “long-time residents see the social fabric of their communities changing” (p. 3). Economically as well as culturally, SAWs participate in public life in ways that produce lasting changes, making them a part of many rural Canadian communities. Their wellbeing and integration are therefore important issues for these communities to address.

The relationship between SAWs and year-round local residents, however, has often been complicated. Bauder et al. (2002) note that interactions between these groups are generally shallow, often limited to customer service transactions in local stores. Furthermore, some studies have reported incidences of discrimination and racism by local residents towards SAWs (Binford, 2019). Nonetheless, in many communities there is a growing interest in the lives and wellbeing of SAWs from concerned citizens and civil society groups. Many of these groups have stepped forward to assist migrants in accessing health and legal services, as well as religious and cultural activities within their

community (Gabriel & Macdonald, 2011; Preibisch, 2007). Therefore, there appears to be an underdeveloped but growing idea that SAWs are community-members deserving of help from citizens and permanent residents.

For these reasons an understanding of the conditions that affect SAWs has implications for governments and residents of rural areas. With many workers returning to the same farms year after year, there is much opportunity to build relationships between them and rural residents, establishing support networks to help improve the conditions outlined above. Based on this understanding, this project sought to understand the factors that influence a worker's ability to connect with local people and form relationships. As those concerned with the welfare of SAWs seek ways to change the negative effects that many experience, studies like this one help to inform where these efforts can best be directed. Recommendations and implications for these groups have been included in Sections 6.4 and 6.5.

## **2.7 Housing in the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program**

The basis for this thesis stems from existing literature which suggests that housing plays a central role in the living conditions, health, and social integration of SAWs in rural communities. Employers can satisfy the housing requirement of the program in a variety of ways. Usually workers live in accommodations on the farm property itself, sometimes in existing structures such as old barns outfitted with bunks and other furniture, or else in

temporary housing including trailers. The Canadian government requires that this housing meets a set of minimum standards through an inspection included as part of the employer's initial Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) to gain entry to the program (Government of Canada, 2020). The form used in this evaluation sets requirements for adequate space, furnishings appliances, temperature control, and other aspects of housing suitability (Government of Canada, 2018). Nonetheless, existing literature suggests that despite these evaluations, the quality of this housing is wide-ranging, with some workers living in relative comfort but many others forced into cramped or substandard conditions (Preibisch & Hennebry, 2011; Tomic et al, 2010). Additionally, there are no restrictions on where workers' housing can be located. While most SAWs are housed at the same location where they work, some employers have adopted off-farm housing solutions in apartment buildings or houses at a separate location. The differences in the experiences of workers living in various types of housing arrangements remains an issue largely unexplored, however, and serves as the primary motivation for this thesis.

The hypothesized importance of location in the experience of SAWs has a basis in existing literature. Otero & Preibisch (2016) identify geographic isolation as a major obstacle to health care for SAWs. Without the ability to walk or drive easily to health clinics, workers are often dependent upon their employer to reach these services. Given the aforementioned apprehension many workers feel towards mentioning health

concerns to employers, this creates a strong disincentive towards seeking medical help. Basok (2002) reports that the remoteness of many farms can also contribute to feelings of social isolation, cutting workers off from potential relationships with the local population. Preibisch (2010) establishes the role of housing in worker-employer relationships, asserting that “[housing] arrangements extend the reach of employers’ control over farm workers’ behavior beyond the sphere of work, including restrictions on workers’ mobility off the farm” (p. 415). SAW housing arrangements are therefore an important component of their wellbeing not only because of the direct effects of substandard living conditions on health, but because of its intrinsic connection to power relations between workers and their employers. This theoretical understanding has informed the research questions of this thesis. Given the arguments found in the literature and explored here, this study was designed to further develop our understanding of whether workers living in off-farm housing arrangements in closer proximity to population centres are better able to assert their rights and integrate within their communities than others.

## **2.8 Summary**

The existing literature on the SAWP has demonstrated its potential for workforce development in the Canadian agricultural sector and rural economic development in Mexico and other sending countries, but it has also exposed many flaws that indicate the need for change. While these flaws have led some to call for the program’s abolishment,

it plays an essential role in the economic stability of many families in sending countries and of the Canadian agri-food sector. The starting position of this thesis is therefore that positive change involves finding ways to improve the situations of SAWs within the existing framework of the program, rather than discarding it altogether. Previous assertions by other authors about the role of housing in the vulnerability of SAWs have inspired the central research question of this thesis: how can housing arrangements for SAWs be optimized to improve their wellbeing and integration into rural communities? It is my intention for this research project to generate knowledge which can help to correct the aspects of the SAWP that lead to the negative outcomes described in much of the literature.

### **3 Methods**

The methods for this study were designed to answer the questions outlined in Section 1.2 using key informant interviews with SAWs and established qualitative analysis practices. These interviews provided data that I used to determine the impact of different housing arrangements on SAWs' experiences in Canada. This chapter explains the planning that went into this study, including the research design, key informant selection, the interview process, field observation, and analysis.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

In planning my research, I consulted Bickman & Rog (2009), who present different varieties of research design in the social sciences and the kinds of questions they are best suited to answer. Following their guidelines, I chose a descriptive research design, which is suitable for answering correlative research questions, in this case concerning the relationship between housing and various aspects of SAW wellbeing and integration. This study is designed to provide an in-depth understanding of the effects of various housing arrangements. Building on the work of Tracy (2013), I chose semi-structured key informant interviews as my primary means of data collection. "Semi-structured" in this case means that interviews were allowed to diverge from my pre-written questions when participants provided unexpected or unsolicited information. This allowed me to

understand not only the answers to the questions I had deemed important but also to see how SAWs' priorities regarding this topic differ from my own.

I also made use of ethnographic research theory in order to understand how best to collect data from another cultural group. Lowery (2010) explains how the process of open-ended or semi-structured interviews with participants embedded in the culture under analysis can yield rich data on group dynamics and behavior. This benefits my study as a large concern of my research is the ability for SAWs to successfully live alongside other workers as well as rural communities and employers. In keeping with these ethnographic research practices, I asked workers to provide information on their relationships with other workers, their employers, and people in the rural communities where they stayed in Canada so as to understand the social structures that they are a part of while in the program.

### **3.2 Key Informant Selection**

I originally intended to conduct interviews with two populations: SAWs and their employers. This would have allowed me to understand the motivations of employers in choosing particular housing arrangements for their workers as well as the effects of these arrangements in practice. However, after multiple attempts to contact employers for interviews, I encountered no willing participants among this group, causing the elimination of this part of the study. Key informant data for this study came exclusively from SAWs.



Officials within the *Secretaría del Trabajo y Provisión Social del Estado de México* (STyPS) were enlisted to facilitate contact with some participants, as is explained below, but they had no input on the findings of this study.

Lowery (2010) explains the importance of selecting knowledgeable informants, especially when researching members of another group or culture. Members of these groups have particular expertise which comes from lived experience, making their participation essential. As such, selection criteria for key informant interviews was designed to ensure that participants would be sufficiently familiar with the subject matter. All participants were SAWs of Mexican citizenship with at least one completed season of work in the program. These selection criteria were chosen to ensure that participants would be able to yield information relevant to the research questions of this project. Workers of Mexican origin were chosen for three primary reasons. First, being the largest population of SAWs by country of origin, it was intended to ease participant recruitment, as there is both a larger pool to draw upon and more extensive networking between workers for snowball recruitment. Secondly, this larger pool allows for a higher degree of confidentiality for participants than there would be with workers of other nationalities. Thirdly, there is evidence in the literature that Mexican SAWs face particular challenges

<sup>7</sup> Translation: Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare of the State of Mexico

integrating into Canadian rural communities due to language barriers (Basok, 2002), making them relevant to this study in a way that workers from other countries are not. Additional selection criteria required that participants be at least 18 years of age and be fluent in either English or Spanish so that they could understand and agree to the consent document. All participants came from the State of Mexico in order to minimize travel between interviews. This state was chosen due to my connections with researchers at the *Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México*, making this a sample of convenience. I deemed this appropriate given that the state from which SAWs originate in Mexico has no obvious relation to their ability to integrate within Canadian society.

An effort was made to achieve a sample with maximum variation as described in Tracy (2013), who explains that seeking out variation between research participants is necessary in order to understand the breadth their group experience. Gender was a key consideration, as Preibisch (2005) points out that there are gendered aspects of the program and that male and female SAWs often face different challenges due to prevalent societal beliefs that agricultural jobs are for men. Given that women make up only 3% of SAWs, it can be difficult to identify them for interviews, which has often caused them to be ignored by researchers (Preibisch, 2005). By consulting with academic colleagues with connections to SAWs in State of Mexico, I was able to secure interviews with two female workers out of my total sample of 14. I also managed to achieve a sample of workers with experience in multiple different provinces, including Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta,

Saskatchewan, and Quebec. This is an important consideration given that farming practices can vary considerably depending on geographic location, meaning that employers in one part of the country may treat employees differently than in another.

Ultimately, I recruited a total of 14 SAWs to participate in interviews. Participants were recruited through three methods. First, several were contacted through academic colleagues in the State of Mexico who had previously-established relationships with SAWs. Second, participants were identified through the STyPS, who conduct debriefing interviews with returning SAWs. The *Secretaría* provided my contact information to SAWs who expressed an interest in participating in the study. I was conscious of the fact that the STyPS may attempt to influence the outcome of this study by connecting me with only workers who would provide positive experiences, due to the clear interest of the Mexican government in having the program portrayed in a positive way<sup>8</sup>. Given this concern, only 3 of 14 participants were selected in this manner, the rest being contacted through the other means described in this section. Finally, participants were asked to pass information about the project on to other SAWs they knew in order to recruit them through a snowball process. This sampling method was used in order to maximize the number of workers I

<sup>8</sup> I further explain how I addressed this concern in my analysis in Section 7.2.

was able to contact and reduce reliance on connections with the STyPS or with academic colleagues.

### **3.3 Interview Process**

All interviews were conducted in participants' homes. This decision was made out of consideration for participants confidentiality as a part of my ethics review<sup>9</sup>. Given the vulnerability of SAWs explained in Chapter 2, it was crucial that this precaution be taken to assure them that their information would remain private. In addition to helping to satisfy the ethical concerns raised above, this was also intended to encourage more honest testimony. I reasoned that speaking to SAWs in their home environment would allow them to speak more freely than they might have at their work sites in Canada, as they would have less cause to fear that their employer might learn of their participation. It also allowed me to make observations about their living situations in Mexico in order to understand the change they go through each year as they enter and exit the program. On several occasions, I was able to spend an entire day visiting with participants and their families, which would have been impossible in Canada. This allowed me to build rapport and trust

<sup>9</sup> This research project was designed to comply with University of Guelph research ethics guidelines. See attached certificate in Appendix I

with my informants, which Morgan & Guevara (2012) explain to be a key determinant of the quality of data collected in interview-based research.

In preparation for my interviews, I had a list of 10 main guiding questions, each of which contained 2 to 5 sub-questions or prompts<sup>10</sup>. As explained above, following a semi-structured approach, I allowed each conversation to diverge from these prepared questions in order to follow the natural progression of discussion and see what each participant valued that I may not have anticipated. I always returned to my prepared prompts eventually in order to ensure that I received answers to my research questions. Once these had all been answered, I offered each participant the opportunity to provide comments on any other issue they wished to talk about in connection with their time in Canada, such as something they would like to change about the program. Following this process, I was able to consistently receive answers to the same series of questions while still prompting a wide variety of responses depending on the experiences and priorities of the individual participant. Interviews ranged in length between 20 and 35 minutes.

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix II for a full list of prepared questions and prompts and Appendix III for an English Translation.

### **3.4 Analytical Techniques**

Key informant interview recordings were transcribed and translated into English, after which they were analyzed to identify overarching themes in relation to my research questions. Based on established qualitative analysis practices found in Benaquisto (2012), I created two types of themes to organize interview data. First, I identified answers to each of my research questions in order to determine the validity of my hypothesis. Secondly, I identified unexpected themes that emerged in multiple interviews to form patterns. Once these themes were established, I searched for trends across interviews to see which themes were most consistent.

#### **3.4.1 Field Observation Analysis**

My field notes were used to keep record of observations I made about the home lives of SAWs and the communities where they live in Mexico. Particular observational data that I believed was informative to this research topic included details about the quality of housing in Mexican rural communities, the organization of family life in SAWs' households, and the professional activities of workers when not in Canada. Hammersley (2012) explains how such observational data can be used to contextualize the findings taken from interviews. Following this advice, I allowed the things I had observed in interview settings to inform how I interpreted interview data. SAWs' home lives affect the way they perceive their conditions in Canada, meaning that in order to understand their

perspective and opinions about the program, it was necessary to observe the changes they undergo every year upon migration.

### **3.5 Limitations**

This research project was designed to generate an understanding of the effects of housing arrangements and geographic location on the SAW experience based on the participation of a limited pool of informants. Given the lack of quantitative analysis or experimental control, it cannot be considered to demonstrate a causal relationship. The findings presented in this thesis are based upon the experiences of fourteen individual migrant workers, and therefore should not be seen as generalizable to the entire population. Additionally, since no SAWP employers participated in this study, any claim made about their motivations in using various housing arrangements or management practices is based solely on the speculation of participants and my own inferences.

### **3.6 Summary**

This thesis project makes use of a defensible qualitative research design which draws on existing social sciences theory. Through 14 key informant interviews with SAWs, I generated a rich pool of data based off of the lived experiences of the population under study. These interviews allowed for participants to guide conversation according to their own individual priorities, in recognition of their expertise in the various issues affecting the

wellbeing of migrant farm workers. This dataset was augmented with field observations to provide context during analysis. Through established analytical practices for qualitative data, I identified the most prevalent and important themes of these interviews in order to form conclusions and recommendations about how best to address the concerns raised by my participants.



## **4 Findings**

### **4.1 Housing Arrangements for Seasonal Agricultural Workers**

Most workers claimed that their housing in the program was at least adequate and, in some cases, quite good, though others related negative experiences. Workers described an array of housing arrangements with widely varying structures, furnishings, levels of crowding, and geographic locations. Most were provided housing on the farm property where they worked, in either a permanent structure or trailer, while 3 had at least one experience of living in off-farm housing in a nearby town. The number of workers sharing a building together ranged from as few as 3 to as many as 70. Most had to share a bedroom with at least one other worker and some reported as many as 6 or 8 workers per bedroom. Only one had ever been provided a private bedroom.

A major determinant in the perceived quality of housing was the number of workers sharing a building. Most workers expressed a strong preference for living in structures with fewer residents. A main reason for this was the tendency for overcrowded houses to lack amenities. In some cases, the number of residents was not reflected proportionately in the appliances and furniture provided, meaning that a house containing 15 or more workers may have no more stoves or refrigerators than one that was home to 3. One participant, describing a house where 21 workers resided, said:

“the house lacked cooking provisions. We only had two stoves, two refrigerators in a decent state, and a space to heat your food, a microwave. They were not sufficient. We had three bathrooms for showering and two with toilets, also quite small in size. One washing machine and one dryer.”

This participant also described a severe lack of space both in common areas and in bedrooms, expressing a frustration at the inability to relax comfortably in non-working hours and store personal items and provisions. “I would like to change the beds” they<sup>11</sup> explained. “They are bunks. You should have a space where you can sit... You should have a space to get dressed. In the kitchen, a space to put your food.”

These statements can be contrasted with those of participants who shared a residence with fewer workers. One worker who stayed in a house with two others on a small-scale farm, described agreeable living conditions:

“The housing they gave us, I would qualify as good. We didn’t lack anything. The kitchen was in a good state. The sleeping quarters were also good. They are bunks but with new mattresses, new sheets, clean. We have heating.”

<sup>11</sup> For all quotations of individual participants, the singular “they” pronoun has been used to conceal the speaker’s gender. This was done in order to reduce the likelihood of participants being identified.

What is particularly notable in the contrast between these two descriptions is that the primary difference between them is the number of workers sharing the space. While both were provided bunk beds, this only creates a problem in a house without adequate common space elsewhere. Others reported similar experiences. Another participant describing the quality of housing said “it’s good. They gave us a house. We have space, so there’s no problem. Seven of us were living there and I had my own room.” The amount of personal and common space provided is therefore a key concern for SAWs.

While most of the housing described was adequate or at worst somewhat uncomfortable, some participants reported farms which offered truly unacceptable living conditions to their workers. One such experience follows:

“There was no air conditioning. The shower was in terrible condition. Sometimes there was no water. In one room of 2 by 2.5 [meters], there would be two workers. It only fit two beds, like bunks, with a space of 30 centimeters in between. We did not have anywhere to put our clothes, no dresser. Also, there was a lot of humidity in the room, even water. Sometimes we had to dry the water with our clothes because there was so much. Our shoes, for example, were always wet because they were made of leather and would absorb the humidity. That house simply was not worthy of a human being.”

This was the most detailed and alarming description of poor living conditions that I encountered in my interviews and illustrates the extent to which employers are enabled to provide substandard housing if they choose to. While the house this participant described may have been adequate at the time it was inspected for the LMIA, this worker's description indicates that it was allowed to fall into decay over time without anyone checking to ensure that it was maintained. This illustrates that while such cases are rare according to the testimony of participants in this investigation, they are allowed to occur. Several participants who had found themselves in such a situation reported having complained to the Canadian government with little to no evidence that their complaint was followed up on. This indicates that substandard housing persists on some farms at least in part due to inadequate government oversight.

Some workers who found themselves in such conditions described having complained to their employers. In such cases, the response was often indifference. One participant who had requested that their employer provide air conditioning was told "In Mexico you do not have air conditioning. Why do you expect it from me here?" As this participant rightly pointed out, the climates of central Mexico, where these workers came from, and Southern Ontario are vastly different, as is the construction of housing. Beyond this, however, this example presents a flawed line of reasoning often used to excuse inadequate conditions for migrant workers. According to this way of thinking, if their conditions in Canada are equal to or better than their conditions at home, they have no

right to complain. I would argue, however, that this allows for any degree of exploitation, based on whatever the employer imagines living conditions to be like in their workers' home country. As such, the conditions created by employers of SAWs ought to be compared to those expected of Canada, not of Mexico.

While almost all participants only had experience living in on-farm accommodations, the geographic remoteness of these farms varied substantially between cases. Some reported living within walking or bicycling distance of population centres such as Leamington while others found themselves in highly remote rural areas, sometimes as much as 45 minutes away from the nearest settlement by car. Such distances have implications for the research questions of this project, since SAWs are often dependent upon employers for transportation, as explained in the literature review. The effects of these distances on the experiences of migrants will be explained in the subsequent sections.

## **4.2 Access to Services**

As explained in the literature review, previous studies have found that SAWs often lack access to a variety of services, some of which, including healthcare, they are legally entitled to under the terms of the program. Among other reasons including language barriers and coercion from employers, it has been suggested that this is partially caused by geographic distance from clinics, support centres, consulates, and other service

providers, as SAWs are most commonly housed on farm properties which are not within walking distance of these places. This section presents the experiences of SAWPs who have lived in a variety of locations in accessing services from healthcare providers, support centres, and consulates.

#### **4.2.1 Health Services**

The living situation and geographic location of workers had an effect on their ability to access healthcare in many cases. In fact, except for the three workers who had been housed inside of a town, not a single participant reported having been able to reach a doctor's office or clinic by foot, always relying on someone to drive them. As explained in the literature review, this poses a potential problem to healthcare access, because an employer might refuse to help them seek medical attention or even terminate their employment contract, sending them home to Mexico early. Interestingly, this proved not to be the experience of most of the workers interviewed. Participants frequently reported that they were able to access medical care when it was required because either their employer or another farm employee was willing to drive them to a doctor's office. In the words of one participant, "my boss makes it happen. I count on their help to bring us [to the doctor] if someone is sick." Another described in greater detail how their employer helped them to receive healthcare:

“I told my boss; he himself made me an appointment; he himself brought me to the doctor. They sent me to have some studies done. We awaited the results and they sent me once again to be attended to.”

Stories such as this show a surprising amount of help and even concern from employers towards the health of their workers. This was not always the case, however. One participant described employers who, though not opposed to their workers seeking medical help, were not willing to facilitate it themselves:

“if I feel unwell, it is my own decision to go to the doctor. If the boss wants to give you fare for the taxi, they give it to you. If not, then no. It depends on each employer... There are farms where they bring you [to the doctor], but in ours, no.”

This points to a potential for very different levels of access to medical care for SAWs depending on the disposition of their employer. Some workers who had spent time on different farms over their years in the program had experienced such variability. According to one such worker, one employer had told them to find their own way to the doctor, whereas the next one had gladly offered to take them. Employers therefore have a high degree of control over whether or not their workers see a doctor as they are almost always too geographically isolated to seek care on their own. In cases where this results in difficulties for the worker, however, it seems to be motivated more by their employer's indifference rather than a desire to exploit the precarity of their employment conditions.

Participants did not report a fear of being sent home if they were open about their medical problems, though some reported a belief that doing so with certain employers would be pointless. As one put it: “when I had health problems, the boss went and brought us to the doctor. There the boss gave me confidence... [but] there was one very bad boss who would tell you no.” The geographic isolation of these workers therefore places a substantial obstacle in the way of receiving medical care which can be, and in many cases is, easily removed through the efforts of a conscious employer, though some choose not to.

Despite the assertion by Preibisch & Hennebry (2011) that workers are unlikely to report health problems to their employer for fear of being sent home, the ones I spoke with told me that this was not the case. While some encountered employers who were slow or reluctant to take them to a doctor, none of them said they feared speaking up about their medical problems. While most participants did not indicate a fear of repatriation due to medical conditions, one reported that employers will sometimes threaten to send sick or injured employees home, which they identified as an injustice, stating simply “if I become ill in Canada, I should receive medical attention in Canada.” This demonstrates that, once again, the issues that the literature identifies as problematic – in this case an employer taking advantage of the vulnerability of sick or injured workers – do not usually result in outright exploitation, but there is also little preventing employers from taking advantage if they choose to.



#### **4.2.2 Migrant Worker Support Centres**

The geographic location of worker housing also affected whether they sought the services of a migrant worker support centre. These centres provide services including legal assistance, translation, and English language courses. Almost all participants were at least aware of these centres during their time in Canada, but several said they had never made use of their services or had done so in some places they had worked but not in others. The determining factor in this decision was distance. Multiple participants described visiting support centres when living in close proximity. “When I lived there, yes [I visited them]” said one, “because they were closer”, whereas another mentioned how at one farm “I did not visit [support centres] because they were too far away.”

This was particularly true of workers living in proximity to major destinations for migrant farm labour, Leamington in particular. Many participants mentioned having visited a support centre in Leamington, several of whom had been unable to elsewhere. “It is very easy [in Leamington]” one claimed, “because they are close to the town. You can get there in a taxi or by bicycle, depending on your need.” This information suggests that access to support centres is not equal in all areas where SAWs reside. In particular, areas with fewer or more widely dispersed workers may be currently underserved by these centres.

### **4.2.3 Consular Services**

Participants described various levels of contact with Mexican government and consular services. Once again, location was a factor. Many participants told me that the nearest consulate was too far away to visit in person. However, they also informed me that they were able to access consular services by phone. As such, geographic remoteness does not appear to prevent SAWs from contacting representatives of their own government.

In fact, several participants related stories of how they had made use of consular services. One explained how they requested and received a change in employers in order to work longer hours to pay for a relative's surgery. Others said they had made complaints about certain employers to the STyPS in their home state, who had ensured that they received a different placement in the following year. These interactions present a very different picture of the Mexican government's involvement in the SAWP than is seen in much of the literature. These participants did not describe a fear of being barred from future participation in the program if they complained to their government, but rather a confidence that they would help in a situation of conflict. However, there were several others who complained that Mexican government officials had denied their requests to change employers or ignored their complaints. In some cases, participants even claimed consular officials had implied there would be negative consequences for their future employment in the program if they continued to complain. It was unclear what the cause was of these vastly different experiences, but it seems that while the Mexican government

has at times advocated on behalf of the workers it sends to Canada, they cannot be relied on to always do so.

### **4.3 Non-Working Hours**

Participants described a wide range of activities which filled their non-working hours while in the program. The choice of what to do during these times often could be attributed to personal preference but in many cases also depended on the choices available, which were in turn limited by the location and living situation of the individual worker.

Participants who had lived in close proximity to urban areas generally reported more frequent trips into town and greater involvement in community activities. One participant who had lived in a town described their free time as such: “we go to church, to have coffee, to walk”, indicating a high degree of mobility and freedom during their non-working hours. This participant even was able to attend a weekly English language course. Others living within a short driving or walking distance of town expressed that they had similar freedom in their non-working hours. One worker who had less interest in social activities with their fellow migrants enjoyed exercise and joined a local running group, eventually participating in multiple local races. Others described going to stores in their free time to purchase gifts for family and friends at home. These different experiences reveal a variety of options available to workers living in close proximity to urban areas. The choice of what to do with this time varied from worker to worker, and

some were more interested in group activities than others, but this came down to personal preference.

Others, however, were more limited in their options for recreation. Some expressed that while they would like to attend activities such as mass or English classes, they were living in a location that was too geographically remote to access them. Most workers lived far enough from the nearest town that they would need someone such as their employer to drive them in and as such did not frequently go there for recreation. Some expressed having enjoyed Canadian rural living, as isolating as it may be. One worker, for example, who lived with two other migrants quite far from the nearest city described spending days off fishing with their companions at a nearby river. In their own words: “the thing is, we were in an area where there is not much to do. We would have to go to the city. Around where we were we didn’t have anything to distract ourselves with. So, we went fishing. A river passed by there and on rest days we would go and toss our lines in to fish.” Stories such as this reveal the wide breadth of SAWs’ experiences. While many may have found the geographic isolation of this worker’s situation difficult, they managed to find a level of comfort in it and even expressed sincere enjoyment of their time in Canada.

Another deterrent to spending free time off of the farm property was the desire to save money. According to one participant “even though the town is close, you tell yourself ‘if I go to the town, I will want something and end up spending ten or twenty dollars.’ I am

supposedly there to make myself a bit of money.” This statement reflects an anxiety around saving money while in the program that echoes much of the literature on SAWs. Authors such as Hennebry & Preibisch (2012) have argued that the financial needs of workers’ families in their home countries limit their power with respect to their employers. However, here it is seen to also limit their ability to interact with rural communities, as the perceived temptation to spend money makes staying on the farm more conducive to workers’ long-term goal of saving their earnings to send home.

An oft-overlooked aspect of the SAW’s experience is that some are genuinely interested in spending time in and exploring Canada. Multiple participants described enjoying excursions to Canadian landmarks, most prominently Niagara Falls, and several expressed a desire to live in different parts of the country. One, for example, claimed that a major motivation for wanting to change employers was in order to go somewhere new: “Honestly, yes, I would like to change [farms], because I have been a long time in only one place. I want to see other places and do other jobs in order to learn more.” This statement brings to mind the notion explained in Section 2.4 that the SAWP builds human capital in workers which they bring back to their home countries. This worker viewed the program as a learning opportunity as well as a way to earn money for their family. However, it also highlights the potential downside of workers staying with one particular employer for too long, as this limits their experience to a single type of work and location.

## **4.4 Socialization and Isolation**

### **4.4.1 Relationships with Other Seasonal Agricultural Workers**

Participants shared a variety of experiences of living alongside other SAWs in Canada. While some complained of having serious difficulties and disagreements in these situations, others described mostly harmonious living situations and even strong friendships that they had developed with their coworkers. Generally, those sharing a living space with fewer people expressed that they had little difficulty getting along. “We were just three people, nothing more,” explained one, “so there wasn’t any problem.” Another put the source of difficulties living together into more explicit terms: “when I lived in a house with six others, I had no problem with anybody. However, in the other place, yes, because there were so many people. 60 or 70 Mexicans work there.” The contrasting experiences described by this worker reveal a key source of disagreement: crowded living conditions. Another participant described the difficulty of living in close quarters with many other workers and the toll that it took on their ability to rest between work days:

“there are problems, in that the working hours are very difficult, and the conditions of the houses are not adequate. So, you don’t have time to relax. The first thing they do when they finish work is, they start to drink. So, then the house is small, they are drinking, and you cannot sleep because they are making noise.”

The statements made by this participant reveal multiple aspects of the difficulty that arises in accommodations on farms. In a situation such as this, where many workers are sharing the same building, it affects their ability to properly rest during their non-working hours. This same participant explained that the lack of space and time to relax had a negative effect on their ability to complete work tasks, as they were too tired to perform as they normally would. This situation also apparently led to their social isolation from their fellow workers, as the cramped living conditions strained their relationships. When asked if they participated in activities with other workers, they simply replied “regularly, no.” The cramped conditions that SAWs sometimes live in can therefore be a source of friction between workers, which may exacerbate their social isolation by hurting relationships amongst themselves.

#### **4.4.2 Communication with Families**

The workers interviewed all had communications with their families during their stay in Canada, generally through digital platforms such as WhatsApp. In many cases they did not have a cellular connection for their mobile phone due to prohibitive costs. However, almost all had been provided wireless internet in their living spaces by their employers. Due to the inconsistent access to high-speed internet experienced in many rural parts of Canada, it was a surprise to learn that workers consistently had sufficient internet speeds for voice or video chat with family in Mexico.

One obstacle that did arise in certain circumstances, however, was network capacity. This was particularly a problem on large-scale farms where many workers are sharing the same living quarters and therefore the same wi-fi network. One worker described their experience with internet access in on-farm housing:

“Telephone service is too expensive. I, personally, did not have it. Our employers installed wi-fi service for us, but we paid half. It was not sufficient, because 50 of us were sharing a single wi-fi network.”

This participant went on to explain that at this farm, if they wanted a reliable connection to call home, they had to do it either late at night or early in the morning. These limitations may increase SAWs’ isolation from their families when living on large-scale farms, indicating a need for improved high-speed internet access in these situations.

In some cases, however, employers went out of their way to ensure that their workers had contact with their families. One participant, for instance explained how their employer, conscious of the limitations of rural internet, made an effort to provide all workers with access to phone service: “She was a boss who, in truth, was always ensuring that we were not lacking anything... When we arrived, she told us, ‘I am going to bring you a telephone. You have to talk to your families.’” This once again shows the variability in the conditions of SAWs from one farm to the next, and the ways that an employer can choose to mitigate obstacles to worker wellbeing created by geography.



#### **4.4.3 Socialization with Canadians**

The workers interviewed, for the most part, did not have extensive interaction with Canadian residents of the communities where they worked, though this varied greatly depending on their location and personal interest. Some found themselves geographically isolated to the point where they had little to no opportunity to meet and form relationships with Canadians even if they wanted to. One participant expressed that while they would have liked to be able to interact more frequently with Canadians, this was not possible given their farm's location:

“My companions and I would talk about how the farm was a little far and that yes, we would like to live a little closer to the city to meet other people, to chat. In my case, I would like to talk with Canadians to learn a little more English.”

This worker's experience shows how geographic isolation can in some cases prevent the integration of SAWs into rural communities, even when there is a will to connect with others. Some other participants found that they simply did not have time for a social life outside of the farm. According to one such worker, “I met few Canadians. As far as I am concerned, they are very good people... but, you cannot leave [the farm]. Your boss gives you work from Monday to Sunday. Because of this I did not meet many.” Even when living relatively close to population centres, therefore, SAWs often do not have the time required to form meaningful relationships with local residents.

Language and cultural barriers also seemed to inhibit integration into rural communities. While participants generally described their interactions with local residents as friendly, in many cases there appears to be an inability to have more meaningful relationships. “Yes, they say hello to us, they smile,” said one, but explained that this was the limit of their contact with residents of the community where they worked. In some cases, workers connected with local residents of Spanish-language backgrounds, such as one who befriended a Canadian citizen who was originally from Mexico: “she would help us. For example, if one of us felt ill and needed to go to the doctor, she would do us the favour of driving us.” The tangible benefit of this relationship illustrates the potential advantage for SAWs of living closer to culturally diverse areas. This situation, however, seemed to be uncommon amongst the participants in this study, as most of them only met Canadians with little or no Spanish language skills.

Some participants, however, had been able to meet and form lasting friendships with Canadians in their communities despite these barriers. As was previously mentioned in Section 4.3, one worker found time to practice running and participate in nearby races while working in Canada. They also said that through these activities, they were able to meet other residents of the community where they worked, some of whom they have maintained contact with over multiple years. They described being able to communicate with these friends, “them speaking a little Spanish and me a little English.” The result for this particular worker was the availability of a support network and social circle whenever

they return to Canada each year. They explained that these Canadian friends would even drive them somewhere if it was necessary or invite them out to dinner. The ability to access a social life within the communities where they work in Canada is therefore a great advantage for some SAWs which is unfortunately out of reach for most.

#### **4.5 Relationships with Employers**

The relationship between SAWs and their employers in Canada, as explained in the literature review, is one complicated by unequal power relations created by SAWs' precarious status. Much of the literature has illuminated the ways in which these power dynamics can be exploited by employers. The information provided by participants in this project yielded a wide variety of experiences that in some ways were unique to each individual worker and in others may be seen to illustrate broad trends throughout the program.

First, some participants reported little to no interactions with their actual employer, instead being instructed and overseen mainly by permanent farm employees. Some attributed this lack of a relationship to language barriers. According to one worker, “[my employer] would greet us, say ‘good morning’, ‘how are you?’, ... that is it, no more ... because we did not know much English.” Many participants said that such language barriers had at times posed obstacles to communicating their needs to employers. In some cases, they said that there were Spanish-speaking employees on the farm who

could act as translators, but others were surprised by their inability to communicate with their employer in Canada:

“Sometimes we do not have direct contact with the bosses... When they give us our talks in the *Secretaría*, they say ‘you will have a translator’, but sometimes it is a lie because there is not anybody to translate for us. And now, in Alberta, the boss almost does not speak any Spanish to us. Another boss in British Columbia was Portuguese and spoke Spanish quite well.”

Language barriers therefore appear to form a major obstacle to adequate communications between Mexican SAWs and employers on many Canadian farms. This can create difficulties for workers in communicating their needs as well as in the fulfillment of their work responsibilities.

Among workers who had more frequent interactions and communications with employers, they described varying levels of satisfaction with the treatment they received. Some were quite quick to state that they got along well with their employers and cited things that they had done for them. “With my current employer, I get along outside of working hours as friends and inside as a boss,” said one. “It is a very good relationship.” “They are good people,” said another. “In fact, when we finished work, they would invite us to eat.” Another described how an employer had intervened in the interest of their workers in an instance of conflict:

“earlier there was [a worker] from Nayarit who was very difficult [to live with], but the boss realized this and excluded him. He opted not to ask for him again. Since then we have not had problems with anyone.”

This example displays how employers in some cases may use their control over their workers for the benefit of the workers themselves. In this case, one worker was causing problems for the others they were living with and the employer took enough of an interest to make a change. The same power structures most commonly decried as a tool for exploitation in the literature can therefore also be used simply as a means of effective workforce management. Employers who recognize the need for harmony among their workers can ensure that each member of the team gets along well with their coworkers, just as a good manager is meant to do.

While the examples provided above illustrate that many worker-employer relationships are healthy and positive, other stories emerged which showed how they can also be strained and even problematic. Some of the same participants who described getting along well with employers also had negative experiences with others. In fact, it seemed that any worker who had been in the program long enough and worked for various employers was likely to have had a bad experience at some point. “I also had an employer that, really, neither outside nor inside [of work] did we get along,” said the same worker who considered their current employer a friend. When asked to elaborate, they explained that this employer attempted to discourage workers from attending English

classes. “He did not tell us why. I asked why. He spoke very little Spanish,” they elaborated, clearly frustrated. This aligns with Basok’s (2002) theory, described in the literature review, that Mexican workers are favoured because their generally limited English abilities make it more difficult for them to talk to people off of the farm. Other participants had employers who apparently did not feel this way and even encouraged them to attend classes. However, this example shows how if an employer wishes to, they can have an undue influence on what workers do in their spare time.

The question of whether employers use geographic isolation to control what migrants do in their non-working hours was a key research concern of this project. The experiences related by participants reveal that in some cases, they do, however in most they allow workers to do more or less as they please. Most workers claimed that their employer had little direct impact on their free time. One participant related that when working in a remote part of British Columbia, their employer had one specific request pertaining to their free time: “The only detail that they told us was to be careful of the animals... Be careful of the bears because they hide themselves in the corn.” Otherwise, they were free to come and go as they please. This anecdote presents a side of the dynamic between SAWs and employers that is often absent from the academic literature. Many employers take their responsibility towards workers quite seriously. Several workers I spoke to saw this themselves. One worker reported that their employer would routinely ask workers where they were going if they left the farm “because the responsibility falls on him, on the boss.”

A certain amount of intrusion by employers into the non-working hours can therefore be attributed to valid concern for their employee. After all, many SAWs are unfamiliar with the places they are living and could easily get lost or injured wandering off of the farm.

There were also, however, instances of employers taking inappropriate efforts to control what workers do during their free time, particularly if they wished to leave the farm property. While the general consensus among those interviewed was that such employers were the exception, rather than the rule, some had first-hand experience with bosses who attempted to limit their activities during non-working hours. One participant had the following to say:

“Currently with this employer that I have, [my time off] is free. You are free to do what you want, except for working somewhere else. That is not permitted by the program, and I am okay with that. But previously I had an employer that limited what you could do. You could not leave [the farm property]. He did not want you to leave to travel to other places, to socialize with other Mexicans, to go to a support centre to learn English.”

This attitude appears in some cases to be primarily motivated by an intention to keep workers isolated. Another participant, when talking about an employer who had attempted to prevent workers from leaving the farm property offered their opinion that “they fear we would open our eyes and pursue legal action” if workers were to converse with people off

the farm about their conditions. One worker went so far as to speculate that these employers are afraid of workers running away, stating “they know perfectly well that they are not good with their workers and they are afraid that we will escape the farm and go to another country. They even keep our documents, our passports.”

These examples provide evidence that in some cases, employers do use the geographic isolation of on-farm housing as a means of control over their workers. While most participants said that this was not their experience, the fact that several workers had encountered such employers suggests that they are not outliers but rather a substantial minority. On-farm and remote housing arrangements therefore do not necessarily mean that employers are likely to exploit their position of power but does make it substantially easier for them to do so.

## **4.6 Summary**

The findings of this project reveal a wide variety of SAWs’ experiences that are more closely related to the disposition of their employer than any other individual factor. The experiences related by participants in this study reveal that, to a certain extent, the hypothesis of this thesis that workers housed in remote locations would have poorer access to services, less interaction with rural communities, and be more vulnerable to exploitation by their employers is valid. Workers who lived on farms outside of any population centre were unable to reach healthcare providers and other services without



outside help. Those who lived in more densely populated areas were more likely than others to participate in communal activities and get to know their neighbours. Employers who wished to cover up poor working and living conditions for their workers could do so partially due to the social and geographic isolation of their workers. However, it also became clear that all of these effects can be mitigated by other factors, such as an employer who takes an interest in the wellbeing of their workers or the intervention of concerned community members. The next chapter will provide some detailed analysis of how the themes identified in these interviews relate to each other and add to our understanding of the experiences of SAWs.

## **5 Analysis**

The findings documented in the previous chapter convey the complex and varied experiences that SAWs have while living in Canada. While the significance of many of these individual findings has been addressed, it is necessary to discuss and summarize the main takeaways that emerge when these experiences are viewed as a whole. This chapter will provide analysis of the key themes which emerged from the cumulative data of this set of interviews. It will also expand upon the relationship between these findings and the previous research explored in Chapter 2.

### **5.1 The Role of Housing Arrangements in Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Integration**

A key research goal of this initiative was to understand the relationship of workers' housing arrangements in Canada and their ability to integrate within the communities where they work and live temporarily. As explained in the literature review, previous scholarship on this subject has suggested that SAWs' relationships to these rural communities is primarily economic, with most social interactions characterized by indifference or occasionally hostility. This research project explored the effects of SAWs' housing arrangements on various aspects of their ability to integrate, including their

relationships with local residents, their participation in communal activities, and their contact with migrant worker advocacy and support groups.

Housing location appears to play a role in determining their level of integration but is far from the only factor. Overall, it seems that geographic remoteness from population centres is a limiting factor, but that proximity also does not guarantee improved integration. For example, as detailed in the previous chapter, multiple participants reported that they could not engage in communal activities including church services, English classes, and celebratory meals because they were simply too far away. This also was cited as a reason for not socializing with other residents in the communities where they worked, as often they lived in sparsely populated areas. The physical remoteness of many SAWPs is therefore a major obstacle to their integration into rural communities.

Conversely, participants who exhibited signs of integration into their host communities in Canada were able to do so because of their proximity. Workers who found and participated in group activities, such as the runner quoted in Section 4.4.3 all lived in relatively close proximity<sup>12</sup> to a town such as Leamington. The location of housing can

<sup>12</sup> In the context of this study, close proximity is considered to be within a distance that workers are willing to walk, cycle or take a taxi. This varies between different participants, but most living within a 15-minute drive to the nearest town considered this to be close.

therefore be seen as a factor in SAW integration but only in that distance from population centres limits their access to communities outside of the farm where they work.

## **5.2 The Role of Housing Arrangements in Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Health and Wellbeing**

### **5.2.1 Location and Access to Services**

The location of workers' housing had an impact on their wellbeing, but one which was mitigated by other factors. Based on the literature outlined in Chapter 2, it was hypothesized that workers living outside of a population centre would have poorer access to healthcare, including visits with medical professionals and purchasing medications. This is supported by much previous research into the health and conditions of SAWs, such as Hennebry et al. (2015), who explain that workers often do not seek medical attention due to an inability to access it without their employer knowing and the structural inequality which leaves them vulnerable to loss of employment and repatriation if their employer sees them as unproductive.

The findings of this project indicated that this may in some cases be true, but that most of the participants interviewed have not encountered this obstacle. Almost all of them indicated that they or their coworkers had sought and received medical care during their time in Canada, even in cases where they lived in remote locations, far from the

nearest health clinics. In most cases, workers enlisted the help of another person, generally either their employer, a farm employee, nearby acquaintances, or local volunteers to drive them to a doctor. Of these options, their employer was the most common. Most expressed that they had no fear of negative consequences when discussing health issues with their employers, though some described experience with employers who would not help them to reach a healthcare provider.

These findings illustrate the importance of SAW integration to their wellbeing, as most of them rely on relationships with Canadian residents in order to access essential services such as healthcare, be it with their employer, a volunteer group, or local acquaintances they meet through communal activities. While most participants reported that their employers were generally supportive in helping them to reach a doctor, the fact remains that there is nothing forcing them to do so. In the uncommon case where an employer refuses to help or actively inhibits a Seasonal Agricultural Worker from seeking medical attention, relationships within the community outside of the farm become all the more necessary. Even in cases where workers feel supported by their employer, such relationships are likely beneficial, as they reduce their dependence on one individual person, providing them with greater autonomy, as they are not beholden to their employer's schedule.

## **5.2.2 The Quality and Size of Living Spaces**

A much more salient concern than location for most participants was the quality and size of the living spaces in their housing. Many of them went into extensive detail and spoke animatedly about the different structures they had lived in while in Canada. While this was clearly an important issue for them, most were surprisingly positive about the conditions of the housing they had received, and their own standards for what constituted good or adequate accommodations were somewhat more lenient than expected. For example, sharing a bedroom with multiple other workers was never described as a problem except in cases of overcrowding. Most participants expressed that they were content so long as beds were in good condition and there were adequate bathroom and kitchen facilities for the number of workers sharing the space.

A key theme that arose was the inverse relationship between the number of workers living in any one place and the ability to coexist there comfortably. Participants who had lived with smaller numbers of people, particularly fewer than 10, typically expressed satisfaction with their living conditions and good relationships with other migrants. This was attributed to two main reasons. First, the facilities provided in worker housing did not seem to be proportional to the number of migrants living there. Consider some of the examples provided by participants of houses containing as many as 70 workers, often sharing the same number of kitchens or bathrooms as much smaller groups elsewhere. It appears that on farms with greater numbers of SAWs, employers

tend not to scale these facilities appropriately. This may be explained by the reduced degree of interaction between workers and employers, as participants also explained that on larger farms they often did not often speak directly to their boss. After all, it is easier to ignore the conditions of other people when one does not ever have to speak to them.

The second reason why participants who had lived with fewer other migrants expressed greater satisfaction with their housing is that they typically were better able to relax in common areas during their non-working hours. As one participant quoted in Section 4.4.1 explained, cramped housing conditions make it impossible for a worker to properly rest at the end of a work day. They explained that this causes not only physical and emotional hardship for the worker, but also the deterioration of their productivity during working hours. This in turn can cause friction with some employers, who do not appear to appreciate the exhaustion that can accumulate over months of hard work and inadequate rest. In this participant's own words "I am conscious that we are going to work a certain number of hours, but I am also conscious that the body has limits... It is something that employers do not understand." The crowdedness of worker housing therefore appears to be an even more important factor than its location, both for their wellbeing, and for farm productivity.

## **5.3 The Importance of Employers to Seasonal Agricultural Workers'**

### **Experience**

Perhaps the most strongly supported insight to emerge from this study is the immense importance of employers to the experiences of SAWs, particularly those living in remote locations. In all aspects of a SAW's daily life, from their access to healthcare to their ability to engage in recreational activities during their free time, it became apparent that their employer's disposition towards helping them was a key determining factor. This finding emerged from practically all key informant interviews as there were no participants who had not needed something from an employer at one time or another.

As explored in the previous chapter, the remote locations of most SAWs' housing creates a reliance on others to access services, food, social activities, and various other things that are crucial to their wellbeing. When the nearest population centre is a 30-minute drive away, it becomes almost impossible for a SAW to visit a grocery store, doctor's office, support centre, or community event on their own, as it is too far to walk and taxis are often unavailable or prohibitively expensive. While a few participants had connections with people within the community that were willing to help them, most were dependent on either their employer or a permanent farm employee to provide transportation. In most cases, participants indicated that their employers were quite willing to help in this way. Many had experience with employers who went out of their way to



accommodate the needs of their workers. However, it was also apparent that this is not always true and comes down to the personal disposition of each individual employer. If an employer does not care to take a sick or injured worker to the hospital, it seems there is practically nothing that can force them to do so.

The control employers have over many aspects of their workers' lives, extending even to their free time, is one of the aspects of the program most frequently criticized in academic discourse, as explained in the literature review. What the findings of this study illustrate is that SAWs living in remote areas are particularly vulnerable to this kind of exploitation. Some participants depended on their employer for virtually everything, as they lived as much as 40 minutes from the nearest settlement and had little to no interaction with the community outside of their farm. Fortunately, in most cases workers were able to depend on their help. However, the fact remains that several had experiences with employers who refused to drive them to a doctor, prohibited them from leaving the farm property to socialize with local residents, or discouraged them from attending English classes. This evidence points to the likelihood that this may be true in at least a substantial minority of cases. While most employers do not appear to abuse their power over SAWs living on their farms, it is clear that they have considerable leeway to do so if they choose to.

Based on the testimony of participants in this study, there are two main factors which may mitigate an employer's control over their workers. First is the establishment of

connections to people from outside of the farm who are able to help workers with transportation if needed. Several participants expressed that friends within the community, volunteer groups, or support centre workers had helped them with a personal matter on various occasions. These relationships lessen dependence on their employer, providing them with some leverage in this professional relationship and reducing their vulnerability to exploitation. Secondly, and connected to the first point, is the proximity of worker housing to population centres. While offsite housing in an actual town seems to be somewhat of a rarity, multiple participants had lived within walking distance of a settlement. The services available in these communities, particularly those in areas dense with migrant farm workers such as Leamington, allowed these workers to visit a support centre or health clinic relatively easily and without the help of their employer if need be. Furthermore, their proximity to other nearby residents and community events allowed these workers to develop networks of acquaintances if they wanted to, which in turn provided them with support beyond their employer.

#### **5.4 The Priorities of Mexican Migrant Farm Workers**

While the key informant interviews conducted for this study indicated that in certain aspects, the location of workers' housing had a profound impact on their experience, they also revealed that it was not a high priority for most participants. When asked whether the location of housing was an important factor in their consideration of whether or not to

return to the same employer in subsequent years (for example, if they would prefer a farm where they are provided housing in town), most said that it was not. Participants explained their rationale for these decisions in a way that revealed three main priorities: the potential to earn and save money, their relationship with their employer, and the quality and spaciousness of the accommodations provided.

Earning potential is clearly a high priority for migrant farm workers, given that the higher wages available in Canada than in their home communities are practically always their primary motivation for joining the program in the first place. One participant put this quite succinctly: “if I leave my country, supposedly it is to get ahead, right?” In some cases, this leads to complicated assessments by workers of whether the money they can earn on some farms is worth the cost it can have to their physical health. Speaking of this challenge, one participant said:

“Sometimes yes, I would like to change jobs. It is a question of money... In Ontario there are farms where there is a lot of work. They can give you 12, 14 hours [per day]. I have talked with friends that make enough money, to the point where they make 200,000 pesos while I make no more than 100,000 pesos. But the advantage I see is that in Ontario there is much work, but it is in greenhouses. Over time, you start to see the consequences of all the chemicals. Where I am, no, because it is in the open country, in the fresh air. It is healthier and for that I am grateful.”

The explanation that this worker provides for their choices hints at some of the points made by other researchers about the power that employers have over their workers due to their economic dependence on the program. If a worker's ultimate priority is to earn as much money as possible to send home to their family, they may be willing to consider working conditions that would otherwise be seen as unacceptable.

Several participants indicated that they were unsatisfied with their current earnings either due to low hourly wages or insufficient working hours on the farm where they were employed. One had experienced a reduction in hours part-way through a season, hindering their efforts to save money to send home:

“I asked [my employer] why they were reducing my hours; what happened? And they told me that the fruit and vegetables were coming to an end, so would it be necessary for me to return to Mexico or would I like a transfer? I told them, ‘if you had told me 10 or 15 days ago, I would have gone to the consulate to seek a transfer but now I believe I would no longer be able to find another placement, so you had better send me to Mexico’”

The experience of this worker indicates a potential issue with the current difficulty most workers face in receiving transfers between employers. Transfers must be requested through the Canadian government and are not guaranteed, as there needs to be a position open elsewhere for them to go to. If work becomes unavailable for unforeseen

reasons at the farm where they are employed, the potential for sending remittances home evaporates. For many of these families, an interruption to this income source could be potentially devastating, as it features heavily into their financial planning.

Employer-worker relations also take a key role in SAWs' considerations of the program. All participants who expressed a desire to return to their current workplace in subsequent years described positive working relationships. Some had been with the same employer for multiple years and had built up a level of trust with them that they feared losing if they were to change to a different farm. As one participant put it, "if I changed, I would return to the beginning." Conversely, several participants had sought changes between or during seasons due to poor relationships with their employers. These two different experiences illustrate that workers are keenly aware of the influence that their employer can have over their time in Canada. Workers who feel they have a good relationship with their employer seem to be more motivated to return.

Finally, participants expressed far more interest in the quality and spaciousness of their accommodations in Canada than in where they were located. Most talked at considerable length about the conditions, good or bad, that they had lived through but had less to say about the benefits or drawbacks of living in a town versus in a sparsely-populated area. Participants mostly articulated in quite straightforward terms what they sought in their housing arrangements. Typically, they asked for simple amenities, such as kitchen appliances in good working order, comfortable mattresses, and air

conditioning. They asked for sufficient space to relax in their downtime and to store their belongings. As one participant put it bluntly, “the location is not important. What matters to me is the space of the house.” This insight presents an important implication for the outcome of this project. It implies that SAWs may have less interest in interacting with Canadian communities than was originally assumed. While the option to meet local people and participate in communal activities appealed to some, the priorities of most of the workers interviewed are more practically focused on their day-to-day comfort. Most workers expressed relative contentment with the program so long as these basic needs were met. In order to have the greatest impact on SAWs’ wellbeing, therefore, it is not strictly necessary to create alternative housing arrangements that bring them closer to rural communities. Instead, this can be achieved through taking concerns about the quality of their housing seriously.

## **5.5 Summary**

Upon analysis, the findings of this study presented a number of potentially important implications for our understanding of the relationship between housing arrangements and SAWs’ well-being and integration into rural communities. The relationships between the geographic location of housing and various hypothesized dependent variables, such as access to healthcare and freedom during non-working hours, proved to be more complex than initially envisioned. While workers living in remote housing were found to be less

able to reach population centres on their own, this seemed to be mitigated in many cases by the willingness of employers to help eliminate this barrier by providing transportation. This insight led to others about the importance of respectful employer-worker relations and the true priorities of SAWs concerning their housing in Canada. This analysis has allowed me to generate recommendations for various stakeholder groups, presented in the following chapter, in order to help promote these goals.

## **6 Implications and Recommendations**

The findings and analysis outlined in the previous two chapters indicate a number of ways in which the SAWP and community responses to it could be improved. Given the great importance of this program to the economic wellbeing of families of SAWs in rural Mexico, as described by participants in this study and in the literature, I will not echo calls by some other researchers and advocates to abolish the program altogether. This would have disastrous effects for both SAWs and for the Canadian agri-food sector. Instead, I have identified ways in which various stakeholder groups can work to address the primary issues identified in this study: the negative effects of geographic isolation on SAWs' wellbeing and the potential for employers to exploit their position of power with respect to their workers. This chapter will present some implications for the work being performed by governments, agri-food employers, public service providers, rural communities, migrants' rights advocates, and researchers, as well as some recommendations for how each group can better serve the SAW community in the future.

### **6.1 For Government**

Since the SAWP is the product of bilateral agreements between Canada and each sending country, all governments involved have an obligation towards SAWs to ensure the protection of their rights. As such, I have considered the roles of both the Canadian and Mexican governments in SAWP administration when creating recommendations. In



both cases, participants indicated that government was not always fulfilling its obligations towards them. The Canadian government, according to these workers, has failed to provide adequate oversight to ensure that employers comply with standards described in SAWs' contracts and the rules of the program. Meanwhile, the Mexican government has not always shown a willingness to help remove workers from exploitative or abusive employers and provide them with alternative employment in the program, according to several participants in this study. The result of inaction from both governments is that SAWP employers who do not wish to provide adequate living and employment conditions for their workers are not compelled to do so. Participants indicated that complaints of mistreatment by employers, such as when they provide unlivable housing or force employees to complete tasks outside of their agreed-upon job description, were often not addressed by either government. As a result, it appears that both governments need to increase efforts to monitor living and working conditions within the program.

Given, the dissatisfaction many participants expressed regarding their housing, it is recommended for the Canadian Government to expand requirements for SAW housing and establish annual inspections to ensure they are met. Currently, the government requires that a housing inspection be filled out by an "authorized private inspector" as part of the LMIA to determine eligibility for the program (Government of Canada, 2020). This appears to be insufficient due to the numerous reports of overcrowding, inadequate

amenities, and lack of air conditioning and/or heating reported by numerous participants.

Two proposals are made regarding this issue:

- The requirements for adequate housing for SAWs at the time of the LMIA should be strengthened. For example, the Housing Inspection Report (Government of Canada, 2018) says that workers “should be provided with an adequate storage space” (p. 5), allowing for some discretion in this matter. Additionally, the Report allows that there “may” be fewer furnishings such as chairs than the number of workers housed would require, which is justified by workers having different shift schedules. Given that several participants in this study described unlivable conditions due to cramped or inadequately furnished housing, the requirements should be changed to state that employers must provide adequate space for both workers and their personal belongings. It should also increase the number of appliances such as refrigerators and the amount of food storage space per resident.
- Annual inspections of worker housing should be performed, as it appears some SAW housing is currently left to disintegrate without further inspections after the LMIA. This will ensure that employers continue to maintain housing after their initial inspection.

The Mexican government, meanwhile, could be more supportive of the migrants they send to Canada in a variety of ways. While some participants had received help from their government, others expressed frustration with their government's lack of a response to complaints they made about their employer or living conditions. Given this recurring issue, it is recommended that:

- Upon receiving a complaint from a SAW, government employees should follow up with employees from that farm in an individual, confidential setting with assurances that their complaints will not jeopardize their future employment in the program.
- The government should enhance their ability to facilitate the transfer of dissatisfied workers within the program. Multiple participants stated that these requests are currently ignored.

It is also recognized based on the outcome of this study that geographic location plays a role in SAWs' recourse towards a negligent or abusive employer, with many workers on more remote farms having little contact with either their own or the Canadian government. As such, it is recommended for both the Canadian and Mexican governments to schedule periodic visits by government employees to speak with workers about their living and working conditions in Canada. This can minimize the barrier for geographically remote SAWs to complain about poor treatment.

## 6.2 For Employers

This thesis paper recognizes that many employers of SAWs care a great deal about their employees and seek opportunities to improve their wellbeing. With this in mind, I have created the following recommendations for employers to optimize housing arrangements for the improvement of SAWs' wellbeing and productivity based on the feedback I received from participants:

- The space of accommodations has a great impact on a worker's ability to rest between working hours. Multiple participants described the difficulty of sleeping or destressing in overcrowded rooms and houses. This in turn had a negative impact on worker productivity, as they reported having to slow down over time due to their inability to recuperate. In this way, expanding the space available to workers or housing fewer workers per unit may actually increase their productivity in addition to their health.
- It is worthwhile to be conscious of the options available to workers for off-farm activity. Those housed outside of walking distance of the nearest town often become entirely dependent on employers for transportation to services, shopping, and recreation. In multiple interviews, the positive impact of access to a vehicle became clear. Providing a vehicle for workers and encouraging them to obtain international licenses gives them greater personal freedom and reduces the

negative effects of geographic isolation in cases where other means of transportation are unavailable.

- Ensure that Spanish-language translation is available for Mexican SAWs to allow them to communicate their needs to their employer and to service providers in the community.

### **6.3 For Public Service Providers**

The findings of this study reveal deficiencies in access to public services for SAWs, particularly those living in geographically isolated locations. Workers who live outside of walking distance of a town or city are almost entirely dependent on their employer for transportation to healthcare providers, government offices, and migrant worker support centres in most cases. Additionally, some participants expressed suspicion of medical workers their employers brought them to. These findings indicate a need for public service providers to facilitate visits by workers without the involvement of their employers. The following recommendations have been prepared for public service providers in areas with substantial numbers of SAWs:

- Visit farms with SAWs within the service area to hand out contact information to workers.

- Ensure that public service providers can be reached by WhatsApp, as this is the primary means of communication for SAWs. Many do not have access to a cellular connection or land line but can use WhatsApp through wi-fi. While WhatsApp cannot be used to communicate confidential information, it can be a valuable resource for scheduling appointments and establishing communication with SAWs.
- Whenever possible, ensure that public service providers have access to an employee or volunteer who understands at least basic Spanish in order to coordinate visits by Mexican SAWs.
- Establish networks with local volunteer groups to organize transportation for SAWs to service centres.

## **6.4 For Rural Communities**

The findings of this study indicated a lack of integration of SAWs into rural communities. Even in cases where workers lived within or close to these communities, they had surprisingly little interaction with local people and that which they did have was generally quite shallow. However, a few positive anecdotes about connection with neighbours and local groups indicate some ways forward for community members interested in SAWs’

integration and wellbeing. The following recommendations have been prepared for such people:

- It is encouraged for neighbours to form relationships with SAWs whenever possible. Inviting them over for dinner or simply enquiring about their wellbeing can be enough to reassure migrants that there are people in the community who care about them. However, be aware that there is some possibility of angering their employers.
- Local interest groups, particularly those involving sport and recreational activities, can reach out to SAWs, providing an opportunity for recreation and socialization in an off-farm context.
- Transportation is one of the most prominent obstacles to community involvement of SAWPs, but it is also surmountable. Local groups wishing to involve SAWs in their events should focus their efforts on providing round-trip transportation.

## **6.5 For Advocates**

Given the importance of the SAWP to Canada's agri-food sector, many of the systemic problems that are most commonly criticized are unlikely to change in the near future. Some migrant worker advocacy groups may therefore wish to focus on mitigating the issues found in this study. The effects of geographic isolation can have a profound

negative impact on SAWs' quality of life, but many of them can be addressed without making drastic changes to the structure of the program as a whole. There are several potential solutions advocates may wish to pursue:

- Lobbying efforts can be made towards enforcing greater government oversight of workers' housing and employers' conduct, as the results of this study indicate that there is little enforcement of the rules concerning either one.
- Simultaneously, advocacy groups may wish to build trust with some employers. The testimony of many participants in this study indicate that most employers do in fact care about the well-being of their workers. There may therefore be opportunities for advocates to work with these employers to improve working and living conditions on their farms.

## **6.6 For Academia**

Based on the information I gained through my interviews, I see a certain amount of disconnect between the priorities of academic research on the SAWP and those of migrants themselves. Much of the literature, as presented in Chapter 2 of this paper, is focused on systematic issues with the program, such as the structural inequality of power dynamics between SAWs and employers or the unethically of migrant labour as a whole. While these topics are certainly worthy of academic inquiry, they sometimes lead to a



focus on condemnation of inequality rather than solutions for the betterment of migrants' conditions. The priorities of the workers I spoke to, as explained in Section 5.4, are somewhat more practical. Among other things, they want more comfortable housing, better compensation, and more choice in the kind of work they do. With this in mind, I have identified three potential directions for future research indicated by the outcomes of this study:

- Several of the workers I spoke with expressed a belief that poor housing conditions significantly lower their work productivity. This idea could be explored through quantitative research, measuring the output of comparable farms with different standards of living conditions for SAWs to see if those with more comfortable housing are actually more productive.
- The dynamic between SAWs and other members of the rural communities where they stay remains one of the least-studied aspects of the SAW experience. This study showed a complex variety of relationships that have emerged between SAWs and their neighbours, but a more in-depth analysis of these interactions would be worthwhile.
- Much of the existing literature on SAWs has been conducted in major centres of migrant farm labour such as Leamington. Part of the value of this thesis project was that by conducting field research in Mexico rather than Canada, I was able to

sample workers who had been on farms across the country, often far from these more well-studied locales. This revealed that SAWs' experiences vary greatly based on proximity to population centres. It would be valuable to conduct research with these workers in geographically isolated settings within Canada in order to observe their interactions with these communities.

## **6.7 Summary**

There is much that can be done to improve the living and working conditions of SAWs. Much of this does not require massive overhauls to the program as it exists, a goal that currently appears unrealistic and potentially harmful. Creating a healthier and more welcoming reality for SAWs can come from the actions of many different stakeholder groups. Governments can do more to enforce protections for these workers. Employers can provide them with transportation, granting them more independence. Public service providers can go out of their way to ensure they are reaching all SAWs in their area. Rural community members can reach out to their migrant neighbours to show that they have local support. Advocacy groups can push government for greater protections of overlooked migrants in remote communities. Researchers can explore the things that most matter according to workers themselves in order to promote discussion of their well-being. Fundamentally, progress towards these goals comes from a recognition that SAWs

are not merely guests or an economic resource, but long-term members of rural communities across Canada.

## **7 Reflections on the Project**

As I undertook fieldwork for this thesis, I found that there was often a substantial difference between my expectations and reality, not only in the findings that I gathered, but also in the process of the research itself. Taking note of these observations, I decided that a brief chapter offering some reflections on my experience would be valuable. This is meant to provide two main things to the reader. First, it contextualizes my findings and the analysis of those findings by illustrating how my fieldwork experience shaped the way that I think and write about these issues. As I will explain, I found that the preconceived notions I had about the program based on what I had read became in many ways unhelpful when it came time to apply my own research design. Furthermore, for me it is a way of recognizing my own personal role in shaping the information used in this study, as of course, I was also a participant in these discussions. Secondly, it may prove useful for future researchers starting out in this field. This applies to both research design and implementation. Had I known certain things that I know now at the beginning of this project, I would have done many things differently. There are certain realities of doing research in a context such as this that I could not have been prepared for, no matter how much I read in anticipation. This chapter will serve as an exploration of some of the challenges but also moments of genuine intercultural connection and learning that informed and shaped this study.

## 7.1 Pre-Conceived Notions and the Need for Adaptable Thinking

My academic introduction to the SAWP and migrant labour more broadly was shaped primarily by discussions of its intrinsic unethicity and documentation of exploitation and abuse. Foundational readings in my early exploration of the topic included Basok's (2002) book *Tortillas and Tomatoes* and Hennebry & Preibisch's (2012) article "A Model for Managed Migration?", both of which approach the program with a sociological lens, exposing the way that structural inequality places SAWs in a vulnerable position with respect to their employers, opening them up to all sorts of mistreatment. Both of these works continue to be relevant and contributed greatly to the background knowledge for this thesis. It is still my opinion that these authors are right to criticize the program and seek ways to eliminate inequalities. The SAWP as it currently exists is incongruous with supposed Canadian values of equality, acceptance of diversity, and the protection of disadvantaged groups.

However, this conception of the SAWP at times interfered with my ability to understand and accept the testimony of my own interview participants. I will admit that I entered this project expecting to hear of mostly negative experiences. As unrealistic as it now sounds, I was anticipating many stories of cruel employers who shut their workers away from society, forced them to work when ill, and sent them away at the first hint of disobedience. What I encountered was rather more complex. Workers told me that, for

the most part, they were relatively satisfied. This is not to say that all were. Some had worked for employers who were at times difficult or even unreasonable. Others had worked on farms that matched the kind of narrative I had previously envisioned, with employers who flagrantly ignored their workers' rights. For the most part, however, the workers I spoke to saw their employers as fair and the program as a net positive influence on their lives and the lives of their families. Several of them proudly showed off the fruits of their labour: a two-story house where once was a run-down shack, greenhouses where they cultivate nopales to sell, their children receiving degrees from prestigious universities like the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* or the *Tecnológico de Monterrey*. These experiences illustrate the importance of not ignoring the autonomy of migrant workers. Though the program is worthy of criticism on many counts, it would be a mistake to assume that workers themselves necessarily view it in primarily negative terms.

This apparent disconnect between the way that the program is seen in academic circles and how it is seen by those who actually participate illustrates the perils of having expectations built exclusively on what you have read. At first, I did not know how to write about my findings. I felt that I could not faithfully represent what my participants were telling me without seeming to downplay valid criticisms about the program, leading to a kind of cognitive dissonance. What I ultimately realized and tried to show in my analysis is that these two truths are not necessarily irreconcilable, but rather show the same thing through different perspectives informed by culture, socioeconomic position, and individual

priorities. Much of the academic discourse around the SAWP has focused on its structural issues and the potential for abuse because it is being viewed as a system. Abuses do not have to occur in a majority of cases in order for this to be a systemic issue. However, when the same phenomenon is scaled down to the experience of an individual worker, it looks very different. Most of the workers I spoke to did not see their time in the program as a negative thing. Several expressed that certain aspects of the program struck them as unfair, but that their experience overall was generally positive. Many even went out of their way to express the gratitude they felt for the opportunity to participate in the program. Compared to their neighbours, they were considerably better-off because of the remittances they had sent to their families. In some cases, most of the hardships that they experience in the program, including long hours, a lack of bargaining rights, and crowded housing, were things they had to deal with at home before they began working in Canada. This certainly should not be used to defend exploitative practices, but from the perspective of these workers, some academic criticisms of the program – particularly calls to abolish it altogether – appear out of step with their own priorities.

None of this is to say that the aforementioned criticisms are wrong or unwarranted. It did, however, change the way I interpreted data and formed conclusions. First, I tried to show the breadth of variety in SAWs' experiences and the duality of many aspects of these experiences. I highlighted the struggles participants had faced but also did not downplay the positive feelings many of them expressed towards their employers and the

communities they had lived in. Both of these are important aspects of their stories. Additionally, when forming my recommendations in Chapter 6, I attempted to reflect as best I could the priorities of my informants and to adopt a pragmatic approach to positive change. A sweeping overhaul of the SAWP is unlikely and could potentially endanger the livelihoods of workers, but small, incremental changes to the practices of various actors have the potential to improve the lives of migrants while they continue to work in Canada.

The point of all of this is that while reviewing the existing literature forms an important part of preparation for this kind of research, it should not determine its outcome. The stories these people told me belong to them and are not required to fit into a pre-existing narrative. Fourteen interviews cannot be said to represent the views of all SAWs, but they do represent those of the ones I spoke to. If they conflict with previously established understandings of this topic, it is only because migrant labour programs present a complexity that is beyond the ability of any one book or research paper to explain fully.

## **7.2 The Challenges and Opportunities of Fieldwork in Rural Mexico**

This thesis is the product of a long and arduous process, through which I learned much about the practice of fieldwork, particularly in the context of rural areas in developing countries. Before embarking on this project, I was familiar with Mexico from previous travels, but I now recognize that I had unrealistic expectations of how my research would



actually play out. This section is intended to illustrate some of the challenges I encountered when I put my research design into practice, and some of the ways I managed to adapt to and overcome them to achieve my goals.

Contacting my participants in the first place took considerably longer than expected. I had limited ability to arrange interviews before arrival in Mexico, given my intention to achieve a representative sample of workers from different geographic contexts in Canada. Additionally, had I recruited participants in Ontario, they could have been from anywhere within Mexico, whereas I was seeking interviews within a reasonably short distance of Toluca, where my host supervisor and I were based for the duration of this project. This required recruitment from within Mexico.

Initial attempts to contact SAWs through the STyPS were productive but led to some complications. First, while the government employees I spoke with were enthusiastic about my research and expressed an interest in improving the conditions of SAWs, their involvement at times proved problematic. For example, at the end of one interview, unbeknownst to me, STyPS employees showed up at the invitation of the interview participant. This negatively affected my confidence in the information provided through this interview. Though the intentions of this surprise visit did not appear malicious, from this point on I avoided making use of the STyPS's contacts. As a result, participants enlisted through the STyPS make up a small portion of the overall pool: only 3 out of 14. All others were contacted through mutual acquaintances (3 of 14) and snowball sampling

(8 of 14). With these concerns in mind, I made note of which interviews were facilitated by the STyPS and compared them to the others I received. There was not a notable difference in the information found in these two groups, so I decided to keep these three interviews in my sample.

Additionally, actually reaching interview participants through this method proved to be no easy task. Transportation in rural parts of Mexico can be complicated. While cities and towns are usually connected by bus routes, most SAWs tend to live in smaller, peripheral communities. To reach these from a bus station requires either assistance from a local acquaintance or the use of a *taxi colectivo*<sup>13</sup>. Even upon arrival in the correct community, finding the house you seek is complicated by the fact that many do not have numbered addresses. Some interviews required navigation based on local landmarks and the advice of helpful neighbours. As a result, getting to the interview was often more work than the interview itself. Each individual interview done this way would typically take the entire day once transportation was taken into account.

Following these initial interviews, snowball sampling allowed for a much more efficient process. 7 of the 14 interviews were recorded in a single day, as a particularly

<sup>13</sup> Taxis colectivos in Mexico are essentially cars or vans that drive along semi-fixed routes and take multiple passengers at a time for a relatively low fare compared to a normal taxi. Finding one that takes the right route to reach your destination often requires asking someone with local knowledge.

helpful participant recruited other SAWs from the same town and invited them to their home for a meal where I could speak to each one individually while the rest socialized. This seemed to also have the unexpected benefit of emboldening some participants to speak up about negative experiences they had had in the program, due to the supportive social context in which these interviews took place. Based on this experience, snowball sampling therefore appears to be not just the most efficient way of conducting research with this particular population, but also one which can potentially yield rich qualitative data.

This point brings me to one of the most important lessons that I learned through this research process. Good qualitative data is born out of trust between the researcher and the participant. Many of these people had little reason to trust me initially, a fact which required me to adapt my approach in several ways. Some of these were minor, such as recognizing that participants were wary of signing documents and allowing them to consent verbally to the interview process instead. Others required considerable work on my part. An anecdote from one of my early interviews provides a good example. One informant seemed initially wary of me when I first contacted them but agreed to an interview. Simultaneously, they invited me to a *temazcal*, a traditional Nahuatl practice of spiritual purification and healing through high heat and steam in a confined space. Knowing little about how this worked, I agreed. My informant brought me to a nearby village and introduced me to a local elder who explained the *temazcal* and its significance.

I asked how long it lasts and was given a vague answer. I then spent the next four hours sweating in a dark room with my informant and three other people I had just met. My openness to this experience appeared to inspire confidence in my informant. They provided honest and thorough answers in our interview and agreed to pass my information along to other workers for recruitment purposes. What this story helps to illustrate is that each interview was never just an interview. All of them required a certain amount of social connection and trust-building outside of the interview. Participants wanted me to sit down for a two-hour *comida*<sup>14</sup> with their family, take a tour of their town to see the local artisanal crafts, or sample a glass of their home-made *pulque*<sup>15</sup>. This often resulted in what was expected to be an hour-long visit turning into an entire afternoon, but it also enhanced my connection to my informants and my appreciation for the choice they make each year when coming to Canada, as I saw first-hand the lives they leave behind. I am confident that this yielded richer data than I would have obtained if my interviews had been done in Canada. It also reinforces my opinion of the value of ethnographic research methods when dealing with a culture that is not your own. Immersion of this sort helps to build trust with informants but also provides valuable cultural context for the information they give you.

<sup>14</sup> The largest and most important meal of the day in Mexican households, usually around 2 or 3pm.

<sup>15</sup> A thick, sour fermented beverage made of the sap of the maguey plant.

### 7.3 Summary

Fieldwork of the kind I completed for this thesis project can be daunting, particularly for researchers like myself who are still early in their academic career. I expected that there would be challenges going into it but was unaware of what those challenges would be and how much adjustment they would require on my part. It was this struggle to overcome the differences between my expectations and reality that inspired me to write this chapter so that others doing similar work might learn from my experience. The overarching point I would like to make is that no amount of background reading could have adequately prepared me to complete this project. Many factors contributed to this, including a lack of shared cultural background with my participants, my inexperience in completing interviews in my second language, and the stresses that accompany long-term immersion in a foreign country. While I would have changed some things had I known what I know now – my list of guiding questions and my approach to participant recruitment, in particular – one thing I would not change is my decision to conduct this research in Mexico. The level of immersion that I experienced by staying in this country for almost half a year led to a richer understanding and a greater level of trust between me and my participants than I ever could have achieved if I had approached them in Canada.

Based on the experiences described above, I have a few pieces of advice for researchers getting started in this field:

- Do not assume that you understand the priorities of SAWs based on academic literature. Previous research on this topic has exposed important truths about the program but is written from an entirely different perspective than their own. What stands out as a problem to a sociologist may not necessarily be a priority for migrants themselves.
- Be flexible in your line of inquiry. Your research questions are an important starting point but may be completely out of touch with what interview participants actually want to talk about. Many of the most valuable insights I received through my interviews were not originally part of my investigation.
- Take opportunities to get to know your participants outside of the interview context. Whether it is a conversation over quesadillas at a local food stand or a four-hour *temazcal*, these interactions can be as important as the interview themselves, as they allow you to build rapport with participants and gain their trust.

## 8 Conclusion

This thesis is the culmination of over a year of work in background reading, research design, fieldwork, and writing. I have built upon previous work about the SAW experience and add several nuances to the conversation. I expand upon arguments found in Basok (2002), Preibisch (2010), and Otero & Preibisch (2016) that the remoteness of much SAW housing exacerbates their social isolation, difficulty in accessing services, and power imbalances with their employers. Through my discussions with SAWs, I found that this idea appears to have some merit based on the results of field research but is not as important as I expected compared to some other factors. The difficulties that many SAWs face – including poor access to health care, vulnerability to exploitation by their employers, and isolation within Canadian society – can indeed be exacerbated by geographically remote housing, as they are unable to walk to most things they need and often have virtually no support within the communities where they live. While this was not true in all or even most cases, this depended to a large extent upon the worker's relationship with their employer. Distance ceases to be a barrier to healthcare if an employer is willing to drive their workers to the doctor. Workers will not fear standing up for their best interests if their employer proves to be receptive to their concerns. Social isolation becomes much less of a problem if employers are supportive of workers seeking out social activities in their free time.

The problems posed by the living situations of most SAWs, therefore, are not insurmountable, but simply require a concerted effort by various stakeholder groups to help migrants overcome barriers. The ever-expanding advocacy and scholarly research on behalf of this group shows a growing interest from the public which may motivate action from government as well. Additionally, the stories of positive relationships between SAWs and their employers shows that they should not be discounted as potential allies in this pursuit. Many may be willing to make changes to the benefit of their workers if provided the knowledge to do so. Based on the qualitative data presented in this thesis, there is opportunity for all stakeholders to do more to improve the conditions of SAWs by connecting them to the services they need, listening and responding to their demands, and recognizing them as a part of Canada's rural communities.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bakhtiar, M. (2015). *Strengthening rural Canada: Fewer & older*. Ottawa: Essential Skills Ontario.
- Basok, T. (2002). *Tortillas and tomatoes: Transmigrant Mexican harvesters in Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Bauder, H., Preibisch, K., Sutherland, S., & Nash, K. (2002). *Impacts of foreign farm workers in Ontario communities*. Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Harald\\_Bauder/publication/246425540\\_Impacts\\_of\\_Foreign\\_Farm\\_Workers\\_in\\_Ontario\\_Communities/links/542348060cf26120b7a6c06f/Impacts-of-Foreign-Farm-Workers-in-Ontario-Communities.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Harald_Bauder/publication/246425540_Impacts_of_Foreign_Farm_Workers_in_Ontario_Communities/links/542348060cf26120b7a6c06f/Impacts-of-Foreign-Farm-Workers-in-Ontario-Communities.pdf)
- Benaquisto, L. (2012) Codes and coding. In L.M. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (pp. 86-88). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Bickman, L. & Rog, D.J. (2009). Applied research design: A practical approach. In D.J. Rog & L. Bickman (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of applied research method*, (pp. 3-43). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Binford, A.L. (2019). Assessing temporary foreign worker programs through the prism of Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program: Can they be reformed or should they be eliminated? *Dialectical Anthropology*, 43(4), 347-366.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-019-09553-6>

Binford, L. (2006). *The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program and Mexican development*. Ottawa: FOCAL.

Binks, B., Stenekes, N., Kruger, H., & Kancans, R. (2016). *Snapshot of Australia's agricultural workforce*. Australian Government, Department of Agriculture.  
<https://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/publications/insights/snapshot-of-australias-agricultural-workforce#who-are-australias-agricultural-employees>

Brickenstein, T. & Tabucanon, G.M. (2013). Circular migration as climate change adaptation: Reconceptualising New Zealand's and Australia's seasonal worker programs. *Precedente*, 3, 7-34. <https://doi.org/10.18046/prec.v3.1724>

Budworth, M.H., Rose, A. & Mann, S. (2017). Report on the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program. *IICA Delegation in Grenada Annual Report 2016*. Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture.  
<http://repositorio.iica.int/bitstream/handle/11324/2694/BVE17038753i.pdf;jsessionid=0A87FE9537E56B7E5E7B5893A5B96D4D?sequence=1>

- CAHRC. (2014a). *Ontario: Agricultural labour market forecast to 2025*. Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council. [https://cahrc-ccrha.ca/sites/default/files/files/Labour-Employment/ON\\_reportE.pdf](https://cahrc-ccrha.ca/sites/default/files/files/Labour-Employment/ON_reportE.pdf)
- CAHRC. (2014b). *Greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture: Labour market forecast to 2025*. Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council. [https://cahrc-ccrha.ca/sites/default/files/files/Labour-Employment/Greenhouse\\_reportE.pdf](https://cahrc-ccrha.ca/sites/default/files/files/Labour-Employment/Greenhouse_reportE.pdf)
- CAHRC. (2017). *A review of Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program*. Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council. <https://cahrc-ccrha.ca/sites/default/files/Emerging-Issues-Research/A%20Review%20of%20Canada%27s%20SAWP-Final.pdf>
- CAHRC. (2019). *How labour challenges will shape the future of agriculture: Agricultural forecast to 2029*. Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council. <https://cahrc-ccrha.ca/sites/default/files/CAHRC-National-Report-FINAL-August-19-2019.pdf>
- Cajax, C.S. & Cohen, A. (2019). "I will not leave my body here": Migrant farmworkers' health and safety amidst a climate of coercion. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(15), 1-14.  
<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16152643>

Carvajal Gutiérrez, L., & Johnson, T. G. (2016). The impact of remittances from Canada's seasonal workers programme on Mexican farms. *International Labour Review*, 155(2), 297-314. doi:10.1111/j.1564-913X.2014.00022.x

Castles, S. (2006). Guestworkers in Europe: A resurrection?. *International Migration Review*, 40(4), 741-766. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2006.00042.x>

Devlin, S. (2016). *Agricultural labour in the UK*. Food Research Collaboration. [https://www.farminguk.com/content/knowledge/Agricultural-Workforce-in-the-UK\(5677-4829-6761-769\).pdf](https://www.farminguk.com/content/knowledge/Agricultural-Workforce-in-the-UK(5677-4829-6761-769).pdf)

Ellermann, A. (2014). Do policy legacies matter? Past and present guest worker recruitment in Germany. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 41(8), 1235-1253. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2014.984667>

Gabriel, C. & MacDonald, L. (2011). Citizenship at the margins: The Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program and civil society advocacy. *Politics and Policy*, 39(1), 45-67. <https://doi-org.subzero.lib.uoguelph.ca/10.1111/j.1747-1346.2010.00282.x>

Government of Canada. (2018). *Schedule F: Housing Inspection Report – Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program and Agricultural Stream*. Government of Canada.

<https://catalogue.servicecanada.gc.ca/content/EForms/en/CallForm.html?Lang=en&PDF=ESDC-EMP5598.pdf>

Government of Canada. (2019a). Government notices. *Canada Gazette* 153(25).

Government of Canada. <http://www.gazette.gc.ca/rp-pr/p1/2019/2019-06-22/html/notice-avis-eng.html#nc2>

Government of Canada. (2019b). *Hire a temporary foreign worker through the Agricultural Stream: Program requirements*. Government of Canada.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/foreign-workers/agricultural/agricultural/requirements.html>

Government of Canada. (2020). *Hire a temporary worker through the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program*. Government of Canada.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/foreign-workers/agricultural/seasonal-agricultural.html>

Gowling, J. (2019, March 28). Agrifood sector welcomes budget's immigration pilot for foreign workers. *CBC News*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/immigration-agriculture-seasonal-workers-1.5070913>

Grimmond, D., Bell, B., & Yap, M. (2014). *Future capability needs for the primary industries in New Zealand*. Wellington: Ministry for Primary Industries.

- Hammersley, M. (2012). Context and contextuality. In L.M. Given, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (p. 123). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Hennebry, J., McLaughlin, J., & Preibisch, K. (2015). Out of the loop: (In)access to health care for migrant workers in Canada. *Journal of International Migration & Integration*, 17(2), 521-538. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-015-0417-1>.
- Hennebry, J. L. (2008). Bienvenidos a Canadá? Globalization and the migration industry surrounding temporary agricultural migration in Canada. *Canadian Studies in Population*, 35(2), 339-356. <https://doi.org/10.25336/P69C8M>
- Hennebry, J. L., & Preibisch, K. (2012). A model for managed migration? Re-examining best practices in Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program. *International Migration*, 50, e19-e40. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2435.2009.00598.x
- Hennebry, J. & Williams, G. (2015). Making vulnerability visible: Medical repatriation and Canada's migrant agricultural workers. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 187(6), 391-392. <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.141189>
- Jokinen, A. & Ollus, N. (2013). Recruitment, exploitation of migrant workers and labour trafficking in Finland, Sweden, Estonia and Lithuania: Introduction and research findings. In N. Ollus, A. Jokinen, and M. Joutsen (Eds.), *Exploitation of Migrant*

*Workers in Finland, Sweden, Estonia and Lithuania: Uncovering the Links Between Recruitment, Irregular Employment Practices and Labour Trafficking* (pp. 9-30). Helsinki: Hakapaino Oy.

Lobley, M., Baker, J.R., Whitehead, I. (2010). Farm succession and retirement: Some international comparisons. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 1(1), 49-64. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2010.011.009>

Lovelock, K. & Leopold, T. (2008). Labour force shortages in rural New Zealand: Temporary migration and the Recognized Seasonal Employer (RSE) work policy. *New Zealand Population Review*, 33(34), 213-234.

Lowery, C. (2010). Ethnographic research methods. In B. Thyer (Ed.), *The Handbook of Social Work Research Methods* (pp. 435-448). London: SAGE Publications, Inc.

MacDermott, T. & Opeskin, B. (2010). Regulating pacific seasonal labour in Australia. *Pacific Affairs*, 83(2), 283-305. <https://doi.org/10.5509/2010832283>

Magnan, A. (2015). The financialization of agri-food in Canada and Australia: Corporate farmland and farm ownership in the grains and oilseed sector. *Journal of Rural Studies* 41, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2015.06.007>

Martin, P. (2006). Managing labour migration: Temporary worker programs for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *International Symposium on International Migration and Development*.

[https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/other/turin/P07\\_Martin.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/other/turin/P07_Martin.pdf)

Martin, L. & Prokkola, E. (2017). Making labour mobile: Borders, precarity, and the competitive state in Finnish migration politics. *Political Geography*, 60, 143-153.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2017.07.009>

Mclaughlin, J., Wells, D., Díaz Mendiburo, A.L., Vasilevska, B. (2018). Temporary workers, temporary fathers: Transnational family impacts of Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program. *Relations Industrielles*, 72(4), 682-709.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1043172ar>

Menz, G. (2008). *The political economy of managed migration: Nonstate actors, Europeanization, and the politics of designing migration policies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Morgan, D.L. & Guevara, H. (2012) Rapport. In L.M. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (p. 729). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Moyce, S.C. & Schenker, M. (2018). Migrant workers and their occupational health and safety. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 39, 351-365.  
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-040617-013714>



- Mussell, A. (2015). *The economic impacts of the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program in the Ontario horticulture sector*. Mississauga: Foreign Agricultural Resource Management Services.
- Nettle, R. (2018). International trends in farm labour demand and availability (and what it means for farmers, advisers, industry and government). *International Agricultural Workforce Conference*, 36, 8-16.  
[https://rirg.fvas.unimelb.edu.au/\\_\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/2886848/final\\_A5-book\\_-\\_Labour-conference.pdf#page=8](https://rirg.fvas.unimelb.edu.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0008/2886848/final_A5-book_-_Labour-conference.pdf#page=8)
- Otero, G., & Preibisch, K. (2016). *Citizenship and precarious labour in Canadian agriculture*. Vancouver: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- Plewa, P. & Miller, M.J. (2005). Postwar and post-Cold War generations of European temporary foreign worker policies: Implications from Spain. *Migraciones Internacionales*, 3(2), 58-83.
- Preibisch, K. (2005). Gender transformative odysseys: Tracing the experiences of transnational migrant women in rural Canada. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 24(4), 91-97.
- Preibisch, K. (2007). Globalizing work, globalizing citizenship: Community-migrant worker alliances in Southwestern Ontario. In S. Krishnamurti & L. Goldring

- (Eds.), *Organizing the Transnational: Labour, Politics, and Social Change* (pp. 97-115). Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Preibisch, K. (2010). Pick-your-own labor: Migrant workers and flexibility in Canadian agriculture. *International Migration Review*, 44(2), 404-441. doi:10.1111/j.1747-7379.2010.00811.x
- Preibisch, K. (2011). Interrogating managed migration's model: A counternarrative of Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program. In D. Hoerder & NH. Faires, (Eds.), *Migrants and Migration in Modern North America: Cross-Border Lives, Labor Markets, and Politics* (pp. 378-390). Durham: Duke University Press.
- Preibisch, K. & Hennebry, J. (2011). Temporary migration, chronic effects: The health of international migrant workers in Canada. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 183(9), 1033-1038. <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.090736>
- Reed, A. J. (2008). Canada's experience with managed migration: The strategic use of temporary foreign worker programs. *International Journal*, 63(2), 469-484. <https://doi-org.subzero.lib.uoguelph.ca/10.1177%2F002070200806300216>
- Rotz, S., Fraser, E.D.G., & Martin, R.C. (2019). Situating tenure, capital and finance in farmland relations: Implications for stewardship and agroecological health in

Ontario, Canada. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 46(1), 142-164.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2017.1351953>

Rourke, J. (2005). Strategies to increase the enrolment of students of rural origin in medical school: Recommendations from the Society of Rural Physicians of Canada. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 172(1), 62-65.

<https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.1040879>

Ruhs, M. & Martin, P. (2008). Numbers vs. rights: Trade-offs and guest worker programs. *International Migration Review*, 42(1), 249-265.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2007.00120.x>

Rye, J.F. (2014). The Western European countryside from an Eastern European perspective: Case of migrant workers in Norwegian agriculture. *European Countryside*, 4, 327-346.

<https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/euco.2014.6.issue-4/euco-2014-0018/euco-2014-0018.pdf>

Rye, J.F. & Scott, S. (2018). International labour migration and food production in rural Europe: A review of the evidence. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 58(4), 928-952.

10.2478/euco-2014-0018

Satzewich, V. (2008). Business or bureaucratic dominance in immigration policymaking in Canada: Why was Mexico included in the Caribbean Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program in 1974? *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 8(2), 255-275. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-007-0026-8>

Statistics Canada. (2018a). Canada goes urban. *The Daily*.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2015004-eng.htm>

Statistics Canada. (2018b). The shift to smaller households over the past century. *The Daily*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2015008-eng.htm>

Statistics Canada. (2019). Study: Long commutes to work by car. *The Daily*.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/190225/dq190225a-eng.htm>

Tipples, R. (2017). New Zealand agricultural employment relations, migration, and 'pledge washing' – the new recipe. *Faculty of Agribusiness & Commerce Working Paper Series*, 19, 1-31.

<http://researcharchive.lincoln.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10182/10271/FACWP-no-19.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y>

Tomic, P., Trumper, R., & Aguiar, L. (2010). Housing regulations and living conditions of Mexican migrant workers in the Okanagan Valley, B.C. *Canadian Issues* (Spring 2010), 78-82.

- Tracy, S.J. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Underhill, E. & Rimmer, M. (2015). Layered vulnerability: Temporary migrants in Australian horticulture. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 58(5), 608-626.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022185615600510>
- Verduzco, G. (2007). *The impact of Canadian labour experience on the household of Mexicans: A seminal view on best practices*. Ottawa: FOCAL.
- VRIC. (2017). *An automation technology strategy for the Canadian horticulture sector*.  
Online publication: Vineland Research & Innovation Centre.  
[http://www.vinelandresearch.com/sites/default/files/vineland\\_automation\\_symposium\\_report-mar2017-v4.pdf](http://www.vinelandresearch.com/sites/default/files/vineland_automation_symposium_report-mar2017-v4.pdf)
- Weiler, A.M. & McLaughlin, J. (2019). Listening to migrant workers: Should Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program be abolished? *Dialectical Anthropology*, 43, 381-388. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-019-09563-4>
- Wells, D., McLaughlin, J., Lyn, A., & Díaz Mendiburo, A. (2014). Sustaining precarious transnational families: The significance of remittances from Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program. *Just Labour*, 22, 144-167.  
<https://doi.org/10.25071/1705-1436.9>

Woolfson, C., Olsson, P.H., & Thörnqvist, C. (2012). Forced labour and migrant berry pickers in Sweden. *International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations*, 28(2), 147-176.

Wulff, M., Carter, T., Vineberg, R. & Ward, S. (2008). Attracting new arrivals to smaller cities and rural communities: Findings from Australia, Canada and New Zealand. *International Migration & Integration*, 9, 119-124. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-008-0048-x>

# APPENDIX I: REB CERTIFICATE



## RESEARCH ETHICS BOARDS *Certification of Ethical Acceptability of Research Involving Human Participants*

**APPROVAL PERIOD:** August 15, 2019  
**EXPIRY DATE:** August 14, 2020  
**REB:** G  
**REB NUMBER:** 19-06-019  
**TYPE OF REVIEW:** Delegated  
**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Gibson, Ryan (gibsonr@uoguelph.ca)  
**DEPARTMENT:** School of Environmental Design & Rural Development  
**SPONSOR(S):** Mitacs  
University of Guelph, OAC Rural Planning Travel Grant  
**TITLE OF PROJECT:** Housing in the Integration and Experience of SAWP Workers

The members of the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board have examined the protocol which describes the participation of the human participants in the above-named research project and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.

The REB requires that researchers:

- Adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and **approved** by the REB.
- Receive approval from the REB for any **modifications** before they can be implemented.
- Report any **change in the source of funding**.
- Report **unexpected events or incidental findings** to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants, and the continuation of the protocol.
- Are responsible for **ascertaining and complying with all applicable legal and regulatory requirements** with respect to consent and the protection of privacy of participants in the jurisdiction of the research project.

The Principal Investigator must:

- Ensure that the ethical guidelines and approvals of facilities or institutions involved in the research are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.
- Submit an **Annual Renewal** to the REB upon completion of the project. If the research is a multi-year project, a status report must be submitted annually prior to the expiry date. Failure to submit an annual status report will lead to your study being suspended and potentially terminated.

The approval for this protocol terminates on the **EXPIRY DATE**, or the term of your appointment or employment at the University of Guelph whichever comes first.

Signature:

Date: August 15, 2019

Stephen P. Lewis  
Chair, Research Ethics Board-General

## APPENDIX II: PREPARED QUESTIONS (SPANISH)

1. ¿Durante el tiempo que estuviste en el Programa, cómo describirías el alojamiento que tu empleador te dio?
  - a. ¿Estaba cerca de la granja donde trabajabas o estaba lejos? ¿Como a qué distancia? lugar?
  - b. ¿A qué distancia estaba el pueblo más cercano?
  - c. ¿Qué tipo de vivienda era? (casa/departamento/traila/otro)
  - d. ¿Con cuántas personas compartiste la casa?
  - e. ¿Con cuántos compartiste el cuarto?
2. Aquellos que vivían cerca de la granja:
  - a. Tenías recesos y tiempos de comida? Adónde ibas en estos tiempos?
  - b. Ibas a comer a tu casa o en el campo?
  - c. Si necesitabas ir al baño, ibas a tu casa o tenías otras opciones?
3. Aquellos que vivían lejos de la granja:
  - a. Quién te llevaba al campo a trabajar?
  - b. Cuánto tiempo te tardabas en llegar al campo?
  - c. Tenías que levantarte más temprano? Qué tanto? ½ hora; 1 hora; más?
  - d. Te contaron esas horas como horas laboradas o sea, te las pagan?
  - e. Los recesos para tu almuerzo los tomabas en el campo o dónde?



4. Conoces los centros de apoyo?
  - a. Has recurrido alguna vez a alguno de ellos?
  - b. Tu patrón te ha comentado sobre los centros de apoyo?
5. Necesitaste atención médica en algún momento mientras estuviste trabajando en Canadá?
  - a. Qué tan fácil fue para ti que te atendieran?
  - b. ¿Estaba cerca, como para ir caminando?
  - c. ¿Había alguna persona que pudiera llevarte con coche?
  - d. ¿Había algún lugar donde te surtieras de tus medicamentos?
6. ¿Qué hacías en tu tiempo libre?
  - a. ¿Podías viajar y conocer el lugar por donde vivías?
  - b. ¿Practicabas algún deporte, ibas a la iglesia o a algún lugar de entretenimiento?
  - c. ¿Alguna vez tu empleador intentó controlar lo que hacías con tu tiempo libre?
7. ¿Cómo te llevabas con los demás trabajadores?
  - a. ¿Hicieron algo juntos fuera del trabajo? (deportes, convivios, otro)
  - b. ¿Fue difícil vivir juntos?
8. ¿Cómo te llevabas con tu patrón?
  - a. ¿Te ayudó a con algo que necesitaste alguna vez?

- b. ¿Te ayudó con el transporte? ¿Te llevó al hospital por ejemplo?
9. ¿Cómo fue tu relación con la gente de la comunidad donde trabajabas?
- a. ¿Eran amables contigo?
  - b. ¿Hiciste alguna amistad con la gente que vivía en los alrededores?
10. ¿Te gustaría trabajar en la misma granja el próximo año?
- a. ¿Por qué?
  - b. ¿En el futuro, preferirías vivir en el campo (es decir, cerca de la granja), o en un pueblo cercano? ¿Por qué?

## **APPENDIX III: PREPARED QUESTIONS (ENGLISH TRANSLATION)**

1. During your time in the Program, how would you describe the housing provided by your employer?
  - a. Was it close to the farm where you worked or further away?
  - b. How far away was the closest town?
  - c. What type of building was it? (house/apartment/trailer/other)
  - d. How many people did you share the house with?
  - e. How many people did you share a room with?
2. Questions for workers living on/close to the farm:
  - a. Did you have breaks and meal times? Where did you go at these times?
  - b. Did you eat where you were working or return to your house?
  - c. If you needed to go to the bathroom, did you have to go to your house or did you have other options?
3. Questions for workers who lived away from the farm where they worked:
  - a. Who brought you to the farm to work?
  - b. How much time did it take to get to work?
  - c. Did you have to get up earlier to get to work? How much time?
  - d. Were these counted as hours for which you were paid?
  - e. Did you take your lunch breaks where you worked or in another place?
4. Were you aware of migrant worker support centres?

- a. Did you ever visit one of these centres?
  - b. Did your employer tell you of these centres?
5. Did you need medical attention at any momento during your stay in Canada?
- a. How easy was it to receive medical attention?
  - b. Were there medical services close-by? How long would it take to walk?
  - c. Was there anyone who would take you in their car?
  - d. Was there a place for you to refill your medical prescriptions?
6. What did you do in your free time?
- a. Could you travel to nearby places?
  - b. Di you participate in any sport, go to church, or go anywhere for entertainment?
  - c. Did your employer ever try to control what you did with your free time?
7. How did you get along with other workers?
- a. Did you do anything together outside of work? (for example sports, activities, etc.)
  - b. Was it difficult to live together?
8. How did you get along with your boss?
- a. Did they ever help you with something you needed?
  - b. When you needed to go somewhere, did they bring you? (for example, to the hospital)

9. How were your relationships with other people in the community where you worked?
- a. Were they kind to you?
  - b. Did you have any friendships with people living nearby?
10. Would you choose to work in the same farm again next year?
- a. Why or why not?
11. In the future, would you prefer to live in the country (on or close to the farm where you work) or in a nearby town? Why?