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Local Produce, Foreign Labor: Labor Mobility Programs and Global Trade Competitiveness in Canada*

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ABSTRACT Temporary visa workers are increasingly taking on a heightened profile in Canada, entering the workforce each year in greater numbers than immigrant workers with labor mobility rights (Sharma 2006). This paper examines the incorporation of foreign workers in Canadian horticulture under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP). I argue that foreign labor supplied under the SAWP secures a flexible workforce for employers and thus improves Canada's trade competitiveness in the global agrifood market. Using multiple research strategies, I track the evolution of Canadian horticulture in the global market and the transformation of labor in this industry. I outline the steady growth in the employment of temporary visa workers in the horticultural industry and show how they have become the preferred and, in some cases, core workforce for horticulture operations. The benefits of SAWP workers to employers include the provision of a workforce with limited rights relative to domestic workers and considerable administrative support in selecting, dispatching, and disciplining workers provided at no cost by labor supply countries. I conclude that the SAWP is a noteworthy example of the role of immigration policy in regulating the labor markets of high-income economies and thus ensuring the position of labor-receiving states within the global political economy.

The significant and growing role of foreign workers in the U.S. economy has been generally well-researched. In the case of Canada, however, less is known about this social trend despite a number of indicators that suggest similar processes are in play, albeit on a different scale and through different mechanisms. Temporary visa workers in particular are increasingly taking on a heightened profile in the ''Great White North,'' finding work in numerous sectors of the economy. Many of the sectors employing foreign workers are geographically immobile—they cannot relocate their production abroad—and include construction, hospitality, and agriculture. In this paper, I focus on the incorporation of foreign workers in the horticultural industry under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP). I argue that

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foreign labor is one of the planks of the global competitiveness of Canadian horticulture and that the industry's comparative advantage rests, in part, on limiting the rights of foreign workers who cannot move out of the sector. I suggest that migration controls, such as so-called ''labor mobility'' programs, are an integral part of Canada's global restructuring and trade competitiveness. In order to build this argument, I present data on the use of foreign workers historically and the growth of horticulture. Based on qualitative research with employers, administrators, and workers, I show how foreign workers have become the preferred and, in some cases, core workforce for horticulture operations and detail the basis for growers' preference. Further, I explore the increasingly permanent nature of this ''temporary'' labor mobility program and the ways in which it provides an ever more flexible workforce.

Research Methodology

This paper is part of an ongoing program of research on the incorporation of foreign workers in Canadian horticulture. The multiple research strategies on which it is based include the analysis of diverse sources of information regarding the evolution of Canadian horticulture in the global market and the transformation of labor in this industry. The paper also relies on ethnographic research and in-depth, semi-structured interviews undertaken in 2002-2004 with government and industry representatives active in the administration of the SAWP (n=12), SAWP workers (n=50), and growers employing foreign farm workers in the province of Ontario (n=32). For the purposes of this paper, the data provided by this latter group was of particular focus. Since a list of the total grower population hiring foreign workers was not available, I selected informants from two regions using snowball sampling. Informants were farming a diverse range of commodities: flowers, nursery stock, field crops, tender fruit, and greenhouse vegetables, and ranged from small operators hiring 2 foreign workers to those employing over 50. Although this small sample of growers precludes any broad generalizations, the qualitative data provide compelling evidence of the specific ways in which foreign workers are being incorporated into Canada's horticulture industry.

Changes in Global Agrifood Systems

Over the last 30 years, but particularly in the last decade, the global agrifood system has experienced significant transformations. Busch and Bains (2004), in their overview of these changes, argue that ''the

expansion and consolidation of food retailers and the shift towards private standards are dramatically reshaping social, political, and economic relationships on a global scale'' (p. 342). A central arena in which the restructuring of the global economy is reshaping these relationships is the labor market serving global agriculture (ILO 2004; McMichael 1996). Recent studies in developing countries on contemporary changes in the global agri-food system have observed a number of trends in production relations with respect to labor, including a growth in informal, contingent employment in horticulture (Barrientos, Dolan, and Tallontire 2003); the proliferation of production contracts for small-holders, often involving the exploitation of unpaid, household labor (Dolan 2002; Raynolds 2002); and the increased use of piece-rate wage schemes to increase production yields (Barrón and Rello 2000). Yet, as Kritzinger, Barrientos, and Rossouw (2004) argue, the trend towards flexible employment in the agricultural sector is also galvanizing in the North. Significant changes to the social relations of agrifood production have also implied important shifts in the ways people are incorporated into wage labor in high-income countries.

One of the most striking trends in this regard is the growing use of foreign workers. In particular, the numbers of people working in high-income countries without status or under temporary work visas is central to the trends differentiating global migration flows from past historical periods. In the case of the United States, perhaps the most prominent example, approximately 90 percent of the migrants who work seasonally on farms producing fruits and vegetables were born abroad, and the share of irregular or unauthorized workers among all hired crop workers rose from less than 10 to over 50 percent through the 1990s (Martin 2004 cited in ILO 2004). The European Union's agricultural sector employs close to 500,000 seasonal workers from countries outside the EU-15, including some 100,000 workers in Britain alone (ILO 2004; Rural Migration News 2004). In Germany, agriculture employs 54 percent of the country's registered seasonal workers (Cyrus 1994 in Hoggart and Mendoza 1999). Most surprising are the changes taking place in the formerly labor-sending countries of the Mediterranean, who have become migrant receivers and permanent migrant destinations in the last 15 to 20 years, particularly in agriculture (Kasimis and Papadopoulos 2005). In Greece, for example, migrants have become the principal contributors of agricultural wage labor (Kasimis and Papadopoulos 2005). Similarly in Italy and Spain, non-European Union migrants are taking on an increasing role in the production of wine grapes, tomatoes, tobacco, and market gardening

(Hoggart and Mendoza 1999). There is evidence to suggest that (im)migrant labor has served as an important factor in both the maintenance of farms as well as the expansion of dynamic crops. In Greece, for example, the availability of foreign workers has allowed the maintenance of farm activity in extensive or EU subsidized agricultural systems and stimulated dynamic, export-oriented agriculture (Kasimis, Papadopoulos, and Zacopoulou 2003).

The use of (im)migrant workers to achieve labor market flexibility has emerged as a central aspect of accumulation in the contemporary economy (Sassen 2000; Sharma 2006). With the increasingly evident wealth gap between poor countries in the South and the high-income countries in the North, state citizenship becomes an ever more relevant basis for inequality among workers in labor-receiving states (Stasiulis and Bakan 2003). The granting or withholding of citizenship rights through immigration policy serves as a powerful tool at the disposal of labor-receiving states in determining incorporations in labor markets specifically, and society in general, often rendering both legal and legitimate discriminations based on the social relations of race, class, and gender (Ball and Piper 2004; Sharma 2006; Stasiulis and Bakan 2003). Immigration policy has thus become an increasingly important arena for regulating the labor markets of high income economies and ensuring their position within the global political economy (Rai 2001; Sharma 2006; Stasiulis and Bakan, 2003). In the case of Canada, Sharma (2006) contends that increasingly restrictive immigration policies have not necessarily served to exclude people per se, but rather to create greater competition within the national labor market. This, she argues, has been achieved principally through the growing admission of foreign workers under conditions that restrict their rights relative to immigrants and Canadian citizens. Accordingly, immigration policy has played a critical role in satisfying employers and maintaining the Canadian economy as globally competitive.

The growing incorporation of (im)migrant workers has also led to a deepening of labor segmentation in labor-receiving countries. As Persaud (2001:379) observes, ''new patterns of accumulation have been increasingly built on a deepening of labor segmentation, both in the global division of labor and in national social formation'' that rest on social relations that separate categories of workers as protected (primary) or contingent (secondary) in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, and citizenship. In the agricultural sector, foreign workers fill those jobs that most domestic workers with labor mobility and other employment options can avoid (Hoggart and Mendoza 1999; Kasimis and Papadopoulos 2005). The availability of this workforce, which often

lacks full citizenship rights and remains socially excluded, allows agriculture to remain as an occupational niche that, despite the existence of some dynamic industries, is contingent, low-waged, and highly flexible. In the remainder of this paper, I describe the employment of foreign workers in Canadian horticulture and how this industry has fared under globalization. I then explore the comparative advantage of foreign workers supplied under the SAWP and argue that the competitiveness of this sector relies, in part, on the provision of this flexible workforce.

Foreign Workers in Canadian Agriculture

Temporary visa workers have become a pervasive feature of the Canadian labor market. Not only are they employed in a wide range of industries, including mining, construction, hospitality, private homes, and agriculture, they represent an increasingly significant share of Canada's (im)migrant work force. Indeed, recent research shows that the numbers of people working in Canada under temporary work visas has grown much more rapidly than permanent immigration by foreign workers (Sharma 2006). The growing use of temporary employment visas by the Canadian state since 1973 has ''repositioned the balance'' between immigrant and non-immigrant people recruited to work in the country, whereby the majority of migrants entering the labor market do so as temporary workers rather than permanent residents[1] (Satzewich 1991; Sharma 2006). While 57 percent of all people classified as workers entering Canada arrived as permanent residents in 1973, sharing most of the same rights as Canadian citizens, by 1993 the percentage of workers entering the country with this status had fallen to 30 percent, with 70 percent entering as foreign workers on temporary employment authorizations (Sharma 1995). By 2004, while the share of temporary visa workers as a percentage of workers entering Canada (65%) next to permanent residents (35%) was similar to that in the 1990s, their actual numbers had risen considerably, from 153,988 to 228,677 (Sharma 2006). Furthermore, if just the group of people entering Canada who were specifically recruited for labor market needs is examined (i.e., those entering under Canada's points system as independent or skilled workers), only 22 percent of (im)migrants in 2004 received permanent resident status and rights while 76 percent

[1] Permanent residents have almost all of the rights accorded Canadian citizens. The three key exceptions are the right to vote in provincial and federal elections, to serve in the federal public office, and to hold political positions. Unlike temporary visa workers, they can move freely in the labor market.

were recruited as migrant workers (Sharma 2006). This supports the contention that ''temporary'' visa workers are gradually becoming a permanent facet of the Canadian labor market.

Agricultural workers account for approximately 20 percent of temporary visa workers entering Canada (CIC 2004). The main mechanism moving foreign workers into agriculture is the Caribbean and Mexican Seasonal Agricultural Worker's Program (SAWP), implemented within bilateral frameworks of agreement between Canada and Jamaica (1966), Barbados (1967), Trinidad and Tobago (1967), Mexico (1974), and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) (1976–1982). The SAWP has experienced accelerated growth since its inception, from 264 workers in 1966 to close to 20,000 in 2006 (Figure 1). The establishment and growth of the Program reflect transformations in the character of Canadian agriculture, including a shift away from the family farm. Over the last half-century, Canadian farms have become larger in size and fewer in number, as well as more specialized, intensive, and productive (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2001; Statistics Canada 2007).[2] Further, the size of growers' households has decreased with a declining interest among growers' children to farm as an occupation (Basok 2002). As can be appreciated in Figure 1, the SAWP experienced two recent periods of growth, one in the late 1980s and a second in the late 1990s. The first can be explained by the simultaneous lifting of the annual quota on the number of foreign workers who could be admitted and the handing over of the program's administration from Human Resources and Skill Development Canada (HRSDC) to the private sector in 1987 (Rural Migration News 2003). In 1986, the year before the quota restriction was lifted and the direct government administration of the program ended, the program had grown to 5,166 workers; by 1989, it had more than doubled to 12,237 (AFL 2003). The more recent period of SAWP expansion can be explained by its extension to new operations that were formerly excluded, such as floriculture, as well as the increased global competitiveness of Canadian horticultural products.

Not only has the SAWP grown appreciably, the range of horticultural operations able to access foreign workers has broadened beyond tobacco and highly perishable fruits and field crops to include flower

[2] The agriculture sector underwent major restructuring in the 1990s. Between 1990–98, the number of small and medium farms combined declined 11.1 percent while commercial farms increased 25.9 percent—with very large farms doubling in number, and large farms increasing by 19.6 percent (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2001).

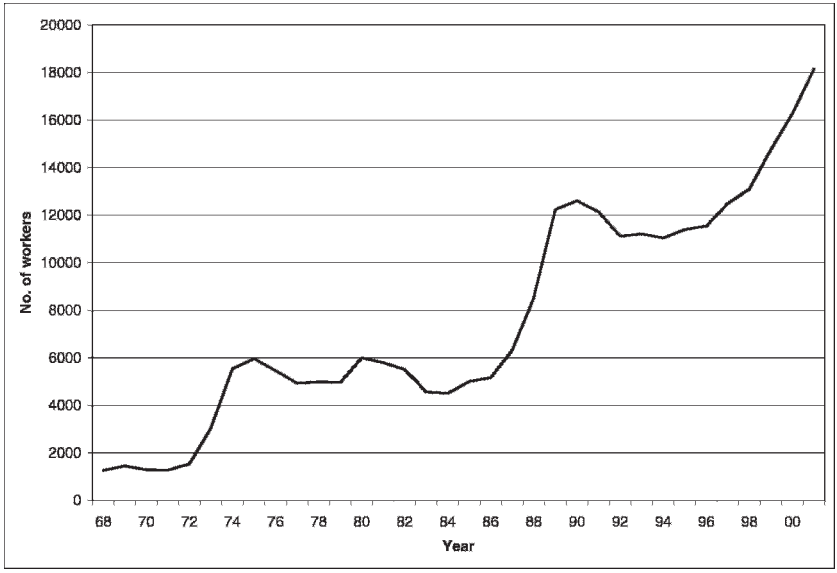


Figure 1. Historical growth of the SAWP (1968–2001)

and vegetable greenhouses, nursery farms, and ginseng operations.[3] Eighty percent of SAWP workers are employed in Ontario, where over half of the horticultural industry in Canada is located. Another 15 percent are employed in Quebec, while the remaining 5 percent are distributed across Alberta, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and, most recently, British Columbia. In Ontario, 23 percent of SAWP workers are employed in vegetables, followed by fruit[4] (21%), and greenhouse operations (19%) (Weston 2007). Weston (2007) notes significant shifts in the demand for SAWP workers by commodity in Ontario over the last 10 years; the share working in tobacco and vegetables dropped by 21 percent and 4 percent respectively, while the importance of the greenhouse sector as an employer of foreign labor increased from 7 to 19 percent. The percentage of SAWP workers employed in fruit production (excluding apples) has also risen from 16 to 21 percent.

There is some evidence to suggest that foreign labor may be replacing domestic workers in Ontario and Quebec, the provinces

[3] The agricultural commodities that have been approved to receive foreign workers under the SAWP are: apples, canning/food processing, fruit and vegetables, greenhouse vegetables, nurseries, sod, tobacco, ginseng, and flowers.

[4] Excluding apples.

employing 95 percent of SAWP workers, where employment of foreign workers has grown appreciably while Canadian wage labor has declined. Weston and Scarpa de Masellis (2003) note that total Canadian employment in the horticultural industries that received foreign workers in Ontario and Quebec declined from 20,380 in 1983 to 14,778 in 2000, while the number of hourly employees fell from 13,748 to 9,518. Over the same period, the number of SAWP workers grew from 4,564 to 16,269. Further, in 2000, SAWP workers accounted for 53 percent of total employment and an estimated 45 percent of total person hours in the agricultural industries using foreign workers (Weston and Scarpa de Masellis 2003). In Manitoba, there is also evidence that SAWP workers have displaced members of the domestic workforce, in particular First Nations groups (Mysyk 2002).

Globalization and Canadian Horticulture

The growth in the SAWP is directly linked to the expansion of Canada's horticulture industry. In Ontario, between 1994 and 2000 the labor force supplied by the SAWP grew 60 percent while in value terms the horticulture industry expanded 90 percent (FARMS 2003). Although Canadian agriculture is most well-known for grain production, today the horticulture sector is larger than the grains sector in 7 out of 10 provinces (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2003). Nationally, horticulture ranks second only to cattle, leading all agricultural sectors valued at $6.8 billion, and before grains valued at $4.3 billion (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2003).[5] The horticulture sector contributes between $5 and $7 billion to Canada's trade balance annually, accounting for 12 percent of the total trade surplus and 15.4 percent of all annual farm cash receipts in 2002 (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2003). Floriculture and nursery is the largest horticultural category by value at $1.9 billion (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2003). The horticulture sector contributes significantly to Canada's role globally as the world's third largest agri-food exporter (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2003).

Although globalization has led to intensified competition in global fruit and vegetable markets, many Canadian horticultural commodities have benefited from trade liberalization, particularly greenhouse flowers and vegetables (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2003; Statistics Canada 2004b). During the 1990s, the total area under glass more than doubled to nearly 1,500 hectares, and by 2003 it had reached

[5] All prices are in Canadian dollars, unless indicated.

nearly 1,900 hectares (Purdy 2005). Revenue from greenhouse sales reached a record high of almost $2.1 billion in 2003, nearly double what it had been just six years earlier (Purdy 2005). In 2003, flowers accounted for about 70 percent of greenhouse sales (Purdy 2005). Over the period 1991 to 2001, production in the floriculture, nursery, Christmas tree, and sod sectors increased in value by an average of 9 percent per year, with Canada becoming a net exporter of floriculture products in 1997 (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2003). The farm gate value of floriculture products grew from $245.9 million in 1990 to $745 million in 2002, or an average of 10 percent per year (Brown and Murphy 2003). In Ontario alone, exports of greenhouse floriculture products increased from $63.3 million in 1991 to $228.7 million in 1998 (360% increase in seven years), placing the province only behind California and Florida as the third top North American producer (White, Bills, and Schluep 2002).

Vegetables account for the remaining 30 percent of greenhouse sales nationally, of which tomatoes represent over half of rates revenue (Purdy 2005). In 2003, Statistics Canada reported that the farm gate value of the four main vegetable crops produced under glass amounted to $605.8 million, or more than three times higher than the value of field production of the same four vegetable crops ($171.7 million) (Purdy 2005). Greenhouse tomatoes in particular have experienced spectacular growth, with Canada shifting from being a net importer of tomatoes to a net exporter in the last decade. Since 1996, greenhouse tomato production by volume and value has more than doubled (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2005). In 2002, Ontario's total greenhouse vegetable area was larger than the entire United States greenhouse vegetable industry (Purdy 2005).

While the greenhouse industry is by far the most dynamic of Canada's horticultural sectors, both the berry and french fry potato industries have also experienced rapid growth in recent years (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2003). Even industries in decline, such as tobacco and apples, have increased their exports. Canada is a net exporter in six of the seven main commodities employing SAWP workers (Weston and Scarpa de Masellis 2003). Taken together, the value of those commodities that are able to hire foreign workers exceeded $800 million in 2000 (Weston and Scarpa de Masellis 2003). The average annual exports of the seven main commodities that receive foreign workers increased in value from $44 million in the 1990s to $366 million in 2000 (Weston and Scarpa de Masellis 2003). The commodities with access to the SAW program have thus fared well under global restructuring and, with the exception of

tobacco and field vegetables, dramatically increased their intake of foreign workers.

Canadian horticultural producers operate in a highly competitive landscape, driven primarily by changes in global trade such as liberalization and deregulation. The trade regime promoted by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) set the stage for large supermarket chains to extend globally and consolidate their market share, to the extent that they now exert market power over the large food processing companies that formerly dominated the food industry, as well as other actors within the commodity chain (Busch and Bains 2004). This is true for Canada: the Canadian food retail market is among the most concentrated in the world, with the top six retailers controlling more than 80 percent of retail food sales (Janoff 2001). Two firms alone have a market share of 55 percent (Janoff 2001). In Canada and elsewhere, supermarkets began to expand in scale during the 1990s such that the larger chains were able to exert market power over upstream actors (Busch and Bains 2004). In addition, food processors and the transnationals that dominate the farm input and technology market have also become more concentrated (NFU 2003; Winson 1996). When farming is left out of the equation, less than a dozen large transnational companies dominate the agri-food chain in Canada (NFU 2003). Another force driving increasing competition is trade liberalization in agri-food products. Canada's principal competitor in this respect is the United States, whose horticultural sector relies heavily on the use of immigrants or unauthorized workers. According to Canada's National Farmer's Union, ''trade and investment agreements [...] have thrust all the world's farmers into a single, hyper-competitive market'' (2003:17).

Globally, while food retailers and the transnationals that dominate the farm input and technology market have become more oligopolistic in both industrialized and middle income countries, the farmer share of the food dollar has diminished (Busch and Bains 2004:331). In Canada, the average net income of farmers has dropped significantly over the last half-century. Although retail prices increased significantly between 1981 and 2003, for most commodities there was no corresponding increase in the prices paid to farmers (Martz 2004). The period 2003–2006 will be among the worst in Canadian history in terms of realized net income (Canadian Federation of Agriculture 2006). This has occurred despite an agricultural policy that has attempted to counteract these trends by

securing agricultural incomes, although not for horticultural products.

These trends deserve more attention that the scope of this paper allows. Highlighting them, however, provides a context for discussion of the growing labor incorporation of foreign workers and the specific ways in which this has occurred. In particular, it draws attention to the global processes that pressure farm operators to seek out more flexible labor arrangements, as well as the direction in which Canadian horticulture appears to be expanding: toward larger, more corporate, export-oriented firms.

The Comparative Advantage of Foreign Workers

The horticulture industry fiercely defends the use of foreign workers as the ''keystone of the industry'' providing a reliable workforce in the face of chronic domestic labor shortfalls (Colby 1997). Industry reports argue that, without foreign workers, most seasonal, labor intensive crops would cease to exist and over half of the Canadian horticulture market would be lost to imports (see for example, FARMS 2003). Industry groups and growers emphasize labor issues as a key concern for horticulture operations with turnover as an ongoing, costly process. As exemplified in the comments by a flower grower: ''[Foreign labor] is extremely important because it provides a stable labor force whereas the Canadian labor force–no one wants these kinds of jobs. It's the same story in Leamington[6] or anywhere else you go that Canadians are not willing to do this type of work.'' With a national unemployment rate of 6.3 percent, employers in the principal horticultural labor markets (Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia) struggle to find workers, competing with industry and tourism.[7] As one greenhouse nursery employer stated:

> [We hired foreign workers because] the biggest thing that we wanted is reliable labor, because we have 40 positions and when we were working with the local people we found that as the years went by, and the economy got better, we would sometimes have 30 people in the morning, we would sometimes have 35, and we would sometimes have 28. And you can't function a business like that.

[6] Leamington, a town located in southwestern Ontario, hosts the largest concentration of greenhouses in North America (Purdy 2005).

[7] In Ontario, the expansion of the auto parts industry has captured a significant portion of the labor force in rural (and urban) areas (Winson and Leach 2003).

The population that the horticulture industry deems unreliable—the domestic labor force—is diverse, but many workers share in common their social and economic marginalization. Agriculture employs a number of recent immigrants, including people without regular immigration status.[8] The general laborers who are referred to by growers as ''Canadians''—often the term reserved for white domestic workers without a perceivable ethnic identity or accent—are often students, women, or from economically-depressed regions of Canada. Rural dwellers compose part of the domestic workforce, but other laborers migrate daily from surrounding urban centers, seasonally from other provinces, or annually in the case of dual-nationality Mennonites who spend the winter on their landholdings in Mexico. Some of these internal migrants are supplied by labor contractors. The crews may be composed of workers in a wide age range, including senior citizens and, in some provinces, children. Despite the historical importance of contractors as labor providers, growers expressed that the workers they provide are not as consistent or reliable as those of the SAWP. As one field vegetable grower articulated:

> The first day you get a whole bunch of young guys who work their butts off and do a real nice job. And the second day you get half young guys and half real old guys. By the fourth day they are all old…and you're pulling your hair. It only works for the farms where you [just] need a warm body.

In addition to the labor sources above, growers are also able to access an expanding pool of undocumented workers. The Globe and Mail, a leading Canadian newspaper, estimates the undocumented population at 200,000 to 300,000 persons (Jiménez and Den Tandt 2005). Although there are no precise estimates of the number of people without status working in agriculture, 15 percent of Barrón's (2004) informants in rural Ontario were working without visas.

High turnover exists among the domestic workforce because these workers are likely to remain in agriculture only until they find better paying and less physically demanding work, or are able to access the social safety net.[9] Domestic workers with other livelihood options simply do not choose to work in agriculture or use it only to supplement their income from full-time jobs. Throughout the twentieth century, farming

[8] Some of the ethnic groups include Portuguese, Hungarians, Poles, Lebanese, South Asians, Chinese, Vietnamese, Guatemalans, Salvadorians, and Mexicans.

[9] Domestic labor shortages in agriculture have also been aggravated, paradoxically, by neoliberal tightening on social programs such as Employment Insurance that no longer allows people receiving benefits to engage in seasonal employment.

operations in Canada were notorious for their inability to retain workers and their continued reliance on historically unfree[10] or marginalized sources of labor, including British orphans[11], interned Japanese Canadians, German prisoners of war, conscientious objectors, and First Nation peoples (Bagnell 2001; Basok 2002; Mysyk 2002; Satzewich 1991; Wall 1992). Little appears to have changed: agriculture continues to persist as an unattractive employment opportunity for Canadian citizens. Grower associations and others often argue that domestic workers prefer to avoid strenuous, dirty work:

> The reality is that [farm work] is difficult work. It's deemed to be grunt work, so there's a lot of bending and stooping and you're in the elements and you must work when nature dictates… Canadian mentality is such that we as a nation don't have a desire to do that so this is why we use the offshore[12] workers (Canadian civil servant).

While in this respect farm work may be less attractive than some jobs, other worksites that continue to attract domestic workers, including meat-packing, factory work, or landscaping, involve similar conditions. It is other characteristics, in addition to the physically demanding nature of agriculture, that constitute the occupation as undesirable. To begin with, farming is considered among the most dangerous occupations in terms of work-related injury[13], yet agricultural workers in many provinces[14] do not enjoy the same labor protections as workers in other sectors. In Ontario, farm workers were excluded from health and safety regulations governing other industries until 2005 and remain excluded in Alberta. Further, since some types of farm work receive more protection than others and workers can change jobs even in the interval of a single day, employees can become confused regarding their rights (Cook 2004). Seasonal harvesters often face the worst conditions and the least protections. In British Columbia's berry industry, the absence of latrines and hand-washing facilities is the norm

[10] A number of scholars have theorized temporary visa workers as a contemporary example of unfree labor within capitalist economies because the visas that bind them to a single employer deny them labor market mobility; that is, they cannot sell their labor power freely (Basok 2002; Satzewich 1991; Sharma 1995, 2006).

[11] At the turn of the century, thousands of impoverished British children were sent to Canadian farms as ''apprentices'' in exchange, upon reaching adulthood, for citizenship (Bagnell 2001).

[12] Canadian administrators, industry representatives, and growers use the word ''offshore'' to refer to foreign farm workers.

[13] Farmers and farm workers account for 13 percent of all occupational fatalities in Canada (Hartling, Pickett and Brison, 2000).

[14] Workplace legislation falls under provincial jurisdiction.

for hand harvesters (BC Federation of Labour 2004). Farm workers in Ontario, furthermore, are legally prevented from unionizing.

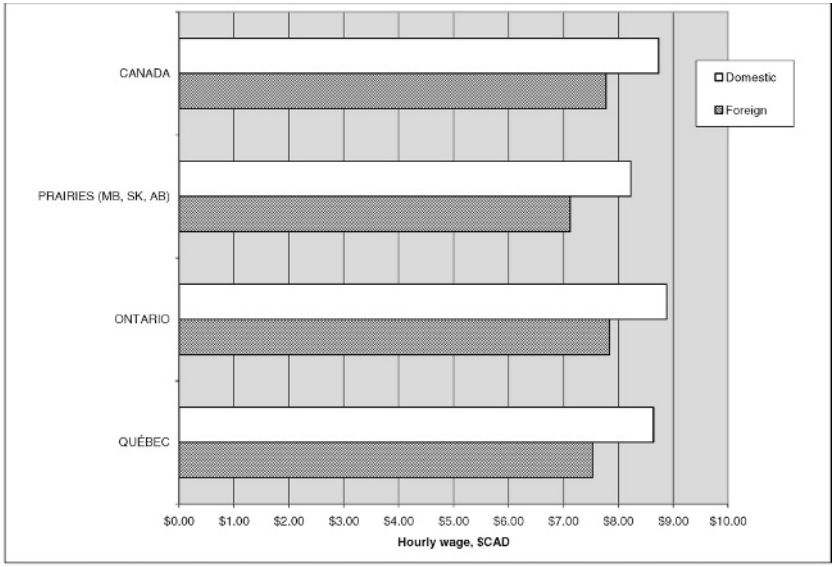
Another reason that explains the high rate of turnover in agriculture is wage rates, which are often lower than those found in other sectors. In some provinces, farm workers are not subject to minimum wage guarantees (Ferguson 2005).[15] In Ontario, farm laborers are on average the lowest paid occupational group of workers (Cook 2004). A recent national wage survey of seasonal workers in the horticulture sector found that domestic workers were earning an average hourly wage of $8.74, with the lowest in Saskatchewan ($7.64) and the highest in British Columbia ($9.44) (Statistics Canada 2004a). While these wages are above the legal minimum wage, they are insufficient to satisfy workers' social reproduction. As one field vegetable grower put it:

> There is no way a Canadian would work for that kind of money [paid to foreign workers]. I almost wouldn't expect Canadians to work for that kind of money because the cost of living is so much higher here [than in Mexico]. There's no way they could support a family at that kind of money.

The SAWP purportedly operates under a labor market policy designed to prevent employers from exploiting foreign workers as a source of cheap labor, driving local wages down, or displacing domestic workers. Prior to the hiring of foreign workers, for example, employers must prove that they attempted to recruit Canadian citizens and permanent residents but were unsuccessful. Further, SAWP policy stipulates that foreign workers are to be paid the greater of the provincially determined minimum wage, the prevailing provincial agricultural wage rate as determined annually by HRSDC, or the rate being paid by the employer to domestic seasonal workers performing the same type of work. Despite the existence of this labor market policy, critics have long argued that the current wage needs to be revised upwards and have reported incidences of Canadians receiving higher wages for equal work (Preibisch 2003; UFCW 2004; Verma 2003). Unsurprisingly, a recent survey aimed at identifying the prevailing wages paid to seasonal horticultural workers in laborer or manual occupations revealed that foreign workers are, on average, paid less than domestic workers (Figure 2).[16] While discrepancies are often justified by

[15] In 1997, hand harvesters picking blueberries in British Columbia were earning between $12 to $40 a day, depending on the harvest. The hourly minimum wage at the time was $7.00 per hour (BC Federation of Labour 2004).

[16] The survey focused specifically on foreign and domestic workers hired in the categories of farm laborers or harvesters, and nursery or greenhouse laborers.



Source: Elaboration based on data from Statistics Canada, 2005

Figure 2. Wage Rate Survey in the horticultural sector, 2004

employers through the contention that the associated costs of the SAWP imply additional costs, the criteria for establishing a wage rate under the Program's policy does not include any calculation for subsidizing employer-borne costs by the employee.[17] Since the SAWP's established wage rate is considered depressed, the only way foreign workers are able to increase their earnings is through working longer hours.

Although foreign workers may be cheaper, the main factor that constitutes them as 'reliable' is the denial of labor mobility (Basok 2002; Sharma 2006). The work permits foreign workers are granted are only valid with their designated employer; they cannot move to more attractive, better-paying work sites. Although the Canadian government refers to the SAWP as a ''labor mobility program,'' it is precisely the lack of labor mobility that differentiates foreign workers from their domestic counterparts. Dismissal is tantamount to deportation. For example, the coordinator of one social justice group noted:

> We've had a number of cases where workers have complained about their housing situation … and within hours they'll be on

[17] This has been calculated for FARMS at an average of $2.54 per hour per employee (FARMS 2003).

> the plane. I have seen it happen over the last two years and we have documented facts where a worker indicated to us, 'you watch, I am going in to talk to the farmer and the consulate tomorrow about my housing situation' and before the guy could even phone to tell us what happened, he was on the plane back (Preibisch 2003:47).

Since foreign workers have been repatriated for falling ill, refusing unsafe work, or raising complaints, the threat of repatriation itself constitutes an effective mechanism of control (Basok 2002; Binford 2002; Preibisch 2004). The following comment from a Canadian administrator is illustrative in this regard: ''There are some cases where the grower will call and say, 'my workers won't get out of bed; what do I do?' I say, 'tell them they're going home.' I mean if they're not good, you fire them like anybody else.'' Foreign agricultural workers, clearly, are not like anybody else—losing one's job means losing the opportunity to work in Canada for that year, if not completely. Since SAWP applicants must be landless agricultural workers or land poor farmers in order to qualify for the program, the economic need to retain their jobs is significant.[18] Indeed, Basok (2002) estimates that Mexican workers' yearly earnings in Canada are five to six times what they would earn at home.

Foreign workers are normally housed on their designated employer's property. Foreign workers' lack of labor mobility coupled with their residential arrangements grants their employer increased access to, and control over, their lives (Wall 1992). One grower boasted about how having his workers housed on the farm allowed him to kick them out of bed when they were late for work. These residential arrangements allow employers to overcome a key constraint they face with domestic workers: transportation. Most entry level domestic workers in agriculture do not have access to their own vehicle (OATI Learning Group 2004). The distance from workers' home to the farm may be great, particular if they live in urban centers, as do most immigrants to Canada. Further, public transportation in rural areas is non-existent. Foreign workers thus represent savings to employers in terms of recruitment, transport costs, and time. The Ontario Fruit and

[18] Basok (2002) notes that Mexican participants are landless and poorly educated, with fewer economic resources than U.S.-bound migrants. Indeed, the Program is a migration-based livelihood available to a poorer segment of the rural population who cannot afford the escalating costs of migrating illegally to the United States: there is no smuggler to pay, and employers even bear some of the immediate costs of visas and airfare, a portion of which is gradually recovered. In addition, the Mexican government has begun providing a subsidy to first-time SAWP applicants roughly equivalent to US $300 to defray some of the initial costs associated with the application process.

Vegetable Growers Association have openly claimed that their members ''prefer migrants from abroad who live on their farms while in Canada rather than Canadian workers who drive from Canadian homes to work everyday'' (Rural Migration News 1999). Even when employers provide transport to and from the farm, domestic workers cannot be guaranteed to show up for work everyday:

> Having them [the foreign workers] housed here, knowing that they're going to be here when you get here in the morning is just so much better than sitting here waiting for somebody who is going to drive in themselves. Some people are chronically late so you wind up holding back so many other guys because one person is late or they don't show up at all (Preibisch 2003:42).

Further, the SAWP residential arrangements allow growers to extend the work day. This point is vividly expressed by a producer of greenhouse flowers:

> Because they live right on the premises, they get out of bed, have breakfast and step out of the trailer and they're at work. It's not a two hour time loss going to and coming back, they're right there. So really working 11 or 12 hours a day for six days a week is perfectly acceptable.

The assertion that foreign workers provided under the SAWP work longer hours and for more days of the week than Canadians has been well-established elsewhere (Basok 2002; Binford 2002). Recent surveys with SAWP participants have recorded work weeks ranging from 60 to 80 hours, with workers regularly working one or both days of the weekend. Russell (2003) found Jamaican SAWP workers averaging 6.7 days per week and 9.5 hours per day. Similarly, Verduzco and Lozano (2003) found Mexican workers regularly working seven days a week, laboring 9.3 hours per day on average, and some reports of shifts up to 17 hours long. Furthermore, Carvajal, Preibisch and Henson's study (2007) reports the average weekly hours among Mexican SAWP workers as 64.2, ranging from 56.3 hours per week in periods of low production to 74.2 in the high season. These findings contrast strikingly to Statistics Canada data for 2005 that estimates the average usual hours worked by employees in Ontario's agricultural sector to range between 31.3 hours per week in January to a high of 42.8 in September (Statistics Canada 2006).[19] In interviews, growers

[19] The national average ranges from a low of 35.9 hours in January to 42.7 in September (Statistics Canada 2006).

repeatedly indicated the willingness of foreign workers to work significantly longer hours than domestic labor. As one vegetable grower stated: ''To have a Canadian work here is to say: how are you going to get a fella to work 60 hours? The whole Canadian philosophy is different. I can't imagine you're going to find somebody to work that amount of hours for minimum wages.'' In many provinces agricultural workers are not paid overtime, providing little incentive for domestic workers to agree to work longer than a standard working day.

SAWP workers are similarly not paid overtime, which indicates that there are other mechanisms operating that account for their long work days. One of these is the fact that they migrate as individuals, not as families. While domestic workers have families to care for and other social responsibilities, foreign workers leave these behind in their countries of origin; SAWP workers enter the country as single applicants, although they must prove that they have dependents in order to qualify for the Program. This preference in recruitment is an attempt by Canadian administrators to deter SAWP participants from attempting to secure permanent residency through marriage or seeking to remain in Canada illegally. It also results in a workforce more willing (and able) to work additional hours. As growers explained:

> Farming is a dirty job, a tough job. The locals have their own families, so they don't want to work weekends. And at harvest time, we're going seven days a week. The locals just wouldn't do it (Field vegetable grower).
>
> With the exception of Vietnamese[20] we are completely dependent on offshore. In some years we've employed them [Vietnamese] for upwards of three and half months. Again we're running into the same problems as we did with the locals; kids go back to school, mothers have to stay home (Tender fruit grower).

Foreign workers, as physically divorced from their own social reproduction, tied to the job, and eager to improve their living conditions in their countries of origin, thus constitute an attractive labor force for an expanding horticultural industry.

The SAWP also allows employers to use discriminatory hiring practices that would arguably contravene provincial and federal human rights codes protecting Canadians. It allows employers to choose, on an annual basis, the countries that will supply them with labor as well as the gender of each worker. The ability to choose the gender and source

[20] Canadian citizens or permanent residents who are ethnic Vietnamese.

country of one's workforce provides the scope for employers to execute gendered and racialized labor strategies designed to promote productivity and impede worker solidarity. For example, it is not uncommon for fruit growers to hire both male and female foreign workers and assign them different tasks. Rather than hire workers from the same country, however, employers will request English-speaking men from the Caribbean and Spanish-speaking women from Mexico. Employers were very candid about these strategies. As one fruit grower stated: ''[previously] it had just been Jamaican men but we did not want to get into a situation with Jamaican women, just for the simple fraternization aspect, so that's why we went with Mexican women.''[21] Other employers have hired two groups of workers differentiated by country of origin and/or indigenous or non-indigenous identity in order to inhibit worker unity and breed competition in efforts to speed up production (see also Binford 2002, 2004).[22]

Most significantly, the policy that allows employers to choose the country of origin of their workers grants them considerable power over the participating labor-sending states and leads to heavy competition between their officials to deliver productive, disciplined workers. Sending countries seek to maintain and expand their share of placements in the SAWP. These labor placements are highly valuable, particularly given the role remittances play in the economies of the SAWP sending countries where they account among the principal sources of foreign exchange and, especially in the Caribbean nations, a vital proportion of the GDP.[23] Indeed, a further benefit of the foreign workforce is that it is managed by a sophisticated labor service that is increasingly tailored to grower specifications and ''just-in-time'' supply, funded not by Canadian taxpayers but those of the labor-sending

[21] Migration flows to Canada through the SAWP are highly masculinized; only 2 to 3 percent of the workforce is female. The gendering of the program has been detailed elsewhere (Bécerril 2003; Preibisch and Hermoso 2006) but suffice to mention here that gender plays a role in the organization of the horticultural industry, most notably on the ''shop-floor''.

[22] A number of authors have suggested that Mexicans represent a more vulnerable source of labor than Caribbean workers because they do not speak either of Canada's official languages (Basok 2002; Preibisch 1998). In the last five years, however, the labor movement and a number of other organizations have made considerable gains in providing resources and support to Spanish-speaking workers. Labor organizers believe the recent emergence of workers who do not speak Spanish is an attempt to counteract these organizing efforts.

[23] Jamaica received US $1.6 billion in remittances in 2005, more than double the sum of overseas development assistance (ODA) and foreign direct investment (FDI), and representing 19 percent of the country's GDP (IADB 2006). Mexico received US $20 billion that year, exceeding the country's revenue from tourism and all its agricultural exports (IADB 2006).

countries. Canadian growers have long lost state-funded labor recruitment and supply services under neoliberal reform. Although employers pay a user fee per worker to the grower association that administers the SAWP, a much greater portion of the costs of recruitment and administration is borne by the labor supply countries that recruit, prepare, and dispatch workers. They also provide government agents—consular personnel (Mexico) or Liaison Officers (the Caribbean)—to serve as worker representatives in Canada and, in the case of Jamaica and Mexico, have even established satellite consular offices in areas of high worker concentration.[24] In order to secure positions in Canada, sending countries strive to provide ''better'' workers and better service than their competitors. According to growers' perceptions, a labor supply country is deemed to be providing good recruitment service when they deliver obedient, skilled workers who return to their home countries following the end of their contracts (Preibisch and Binford 2007).[25] The ability to recruit docile workers is a clear criterion by which countries' recruitment services are judged. One Caribbean administrator, explaining his region's diminishing share of placements, stated:

> Caribbean people tend to question things and they don't back down on what they perceive to be their rights. That could be a negative because some employers don't want that. They want a peaceful life, a guy who comes and works hard and doesn't mind if he gets a ten minute break or not.

One grower expressed this issue bluntly: ''The Jamaicans are no good because they complain a lot, and spend their time partying. A lot go AWOL.'' One of Mexico's strategies to discipline their workers consists of a yearly evaluation completed by employers that SAWP candidates must submit in order to participate in the following season. Many workers fear a negative evaluation will compromise their continuity in the program (Basok 2002) or result in reassignment to a less attractive placement.

[24] Verduzco and Lozano (2003) estimate the costs to the Mexican Ministry of Labor as at least US $219 per worker, not including the US $300 economic support to new participants to cover their travel costs that applying incurs, nor the costs borne by the Ministry of External Affairs who supply the diplomatic personnel in Canada.

[25] One principal reason explaining the displacement of workers from the Caribbean by Mexicans is the increasing numbers of SAWP participants from the island states who go AWOL, finding refuge among the large Caribbean diaspora presiding in Toronto (Preibisch and Binford 2007). Mexican workers who lack proximate social networks within Canada are more likely to desert to the United States, a significantly riskier endeavor following stepped up border controls since 9/11.

In order to supply ''better'' workers, labor supply countries are also seeking SAWP candidates beyond traditional sending areas. In the case of Mexico, this has included a technologically-sophisticated decentralization program that has extended a number of administrative functions, including recruitment, beyond the nation's capital into the most far-flung states, including the indigenous-populated south. Labor supply countries discipline SAWP recruits in other ways. Jamaica froze recruitment from one entire parish when three workers from the area were caught smuggling drugs into Canada.

As important as proper worker selection is the ability to deliver workers ''just in time.'' One Canadian administrator explained how growers factor in worker delivery time when deciding on a source country:

> Once the request goes through, it's getting the worker here on time. So the turnaround time to replace that worker in the case of emergency, when a worker decides not to work or gets ill, or has to go home for personal reasons, or for the employer to get additional workers […] is a very big telling factor.

Indeed, labor-sending country administrators pride themselves on their ability to respond quickly to employer demands. One official related how they were able to mobilize and send 40 workers within 3 days of receiving the employer's requisition. In recent years, the agreements signed between Mexico and Canada have reduced the number of days HRSDC must request workers before they are needed in Canada and increased the number of workers that Mexico must have in reserve to respond to any sudden demand (Verduzco and Lozano 2003).

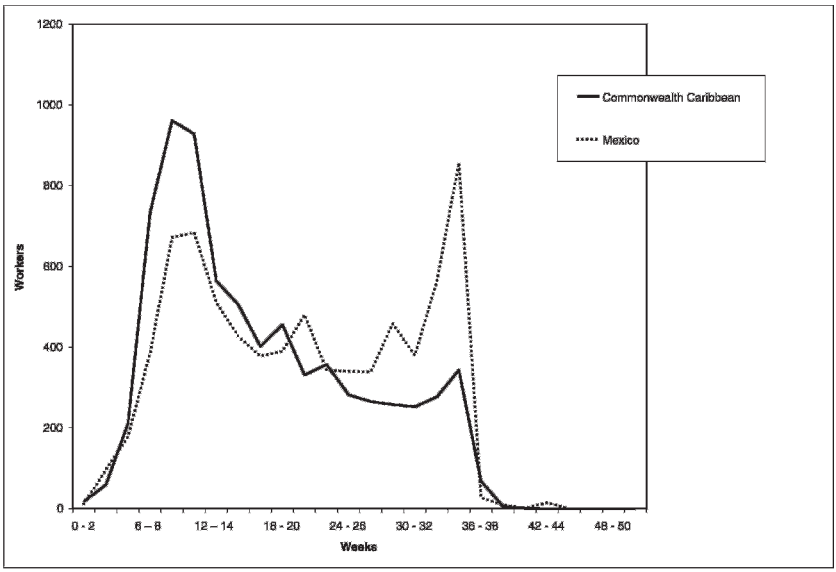
Growers also praise foreign country government agents' ability to solve any problems that occur during workers' tenure in Canada, ranging from labor disputes to homesickness. Good service includes the timely response of government agents to these concerns, in order to limit interruptions in production. One field vegetable grower expressed praise for a government agent in solving his particular problem:

> [Caribbean workers] have more attitude. They were out drinking and partying all the time, then disappearing for days at a time […]. We had this one guy from Dominica, who met some friends from his own country working on the railway and then expected the same benefits and salaries as Canadians! But [the labor sending country official] straightened it out. One year, three [workers] got sent back, and we got other ones.

It is important to note that, because government agents have the dual role of defending workers and securing more labor placements in Canada (i.e., remittances), workers' genuine representation before their employers is compromised. Indeed, sending country officials recognize that ''too much'' representation may result in the loss of the farm to a competitor nation.

There are strong indications to suggest that the use of foreign workers has extended beyond the government's designation of this group as an unskilled, ''supplementary source of seasonal labor'' (HRSDC 2005). Interviews found that foreign workers are increasingly becoming integral to the enterprises that employ them. To begin with, the notion of ''seasonal'' appears to apply less and less to a number of the horticultural operations employing foreign workers. Individual contracts can last up to eight months of the year, and foreign workers may be requested from early January to late December. About a quarter of SAWP workers spend a larger part of their lives each year working abroad than they do in their home communities. For Mexican workers, this figure rises to 40 percent (Figure 3). Overall, 58 percent of SAWP workers are employed in Canada for up to 5 months, 18 percent work between 5 and 7 months, and 24 percent are employed for 7 to 8 months. As a result of a policy that allows employers to request their workers for the following year by name, a number of foreign workers have established lengthy labor trajectories. Verduzco and Lozano (2003) found that 29 percent of the Mexican SAWP workers they surveyed had spent between 10 to 25 years in the Canadian program. Year-to-year turnover is fairly low as a result of the provision allowing employers to receive the same workers: in 2002, 88 percent of Jamaican workers were requested by name by their employers. Some labor supply countries institute additional mechanisms to reduce turnover, requiring workers to remain on the same farm for three seasons before honoring their requests for a change of farm (Binford 2002). This informal ''three-year rule'' eases turnover for even the most undesirable worksites (Binford 2002). These policies, coupled with workers' structured vulnerability and economic need, result in a highly stable, ''reliable'' workforce. Indeed, an estimated 98.5 percent finish their contracts each year (FARMS 2003).

Further, the notion of foreign workers as an unskilled source of labor requires interrogation. Foreign workers bring a range of skills to their workplaces and develop others through experience on Canadian farms. Labor supply countries are encouraged to recruit participants with experience in agriculture; the majority of SAWP workers are waged agricultural workers or wage-dependent small farmers before migrating



Source: FARMS, 2002

Figure 3. Average Worker Length of Stay

(Russell 2003; Verduzco and Lozano 2003). Mexican officials believe it is precisely their compatriots' prior experience in fruit and vegetable production that explains the country's growing share of labor placements with respect to the Caribbean. Furthermore, some workers have international driving licenses, know how to operate complex machinery, and/or are experienced in trades. Workers with 10 to 20 years of experience claimed that they are responsible for the farm while their employers attend to business or go on vacation. Growers are highly cognizant of the benefits of the naming policy:

> You couldn't get locals that would go away in September and come back in February, they would probably find a job in between. These guys come back in February when you need them and they know what to do almost before they get in the door (Field vegetable grower).

Thus while many foreign workers may be engaged in so-called ''general labor'' on Canadian farms, a number of them are highly skilled and experienced.[26] Administrators in Canada and the labor supply

[26] It is not surprising that an ongoing demand of labor-sending countries in annual SAWP negotiations is that seniority and skill level is included in wage rate calculations.

countries claimed in interviews that employers are increasingly requesting workers with specific characteristics, including international driver's licenses, English language skills, and commodity-specific expertise. Mexico, for example, has recruited workers with experience in strawberry harvesting and beekeeping to fulfill these same jobs in Canada.

The characterizing of foreign workers as a supplemental labor force must also be questioned. In some operations, it is likely that foreign workers have become the core workforce, while domestic workers serve as supplements. As one vegetable grower stated: ''Off-season we hire some kids in the packing barn… We just have them just to fill in making baskets and it is very light work. The main jobs have to be done by offshore. […] You can't count on the Canadian workers.'' Similarly, an industry representative articulated rhetorically: ''Sometimes you ask: which is your core labor force and which is supplemental?'' Employers have also devised a number of strategies to avoid using domestic workers, such as extending the period in which they contract foreign workers: ''We used to hire East Indians to do the weeding, but now we request the Mexicans to arrive early'' (Field vegetable grower). There are also a number of strategies employers use to extend the period in which they have access to foreign workers, such as farming a variety of crops with overlapping growing seasons. Other strategies include a ''double entry'', whereby the grower pays for the airfare to bring the same group of workers up twice in one year, sending them home in periods of low production or requesting workers for two periods of six months each. Some growers explained that, in addition to their foreign workforce, they used domestic workers supplied through labor contractors sporadically at peak harvest times, or before or after their SAWP crew arrived or departed. Further, greenhouse growers are instituting new arrangements in order to access foreign workers year-round, whereby they request one crew of workers to arrive in January and leave in September and another for March to December.

Canadian growers recognize the importance of the SAWP to the horticultural industry. In a number of venues, including industry reports and interviews with the press, Canadian growers employing SAWP workers attribute the continued operation of their enterprises, and in some cases, their booming success, to the availability of foreign workers. The following passages from interviews illustrate this sentiment:

> They [the foreign workers] are the back bone of my labor operation. They are by far the biggest component I have and if

> I did not have offshore labor then I would never survive (Field vegetable grower).
>
> If it weren't for this program, we would not be able to farm as we do […]. In 1974 I began with 42 acres, and now I farm 250 acres. We couldn't do that on our own. If it wasn't for this labor force, I would have stayed around 75 to 100 acres (Field vegetable grower).
>
> Without the [SAW] program, I don't think we'd have grown. We went from about two and a half acres in the mid 1980s to about ten acres now, and most of the growth was the last three or four years. And I don't think we would have done that without the offshore. I've even told people: ''this business wouldn't be worth being in without offshore labor.'' It's what makes it work. Without it this business would be a lot different, and probably the whole industry would be a whole lot smaller (Greenhouse vegetable farmer).
>
> I wouldn't be able to run [my business] without it. Anyone who is in it for a living and in it to make money probably wouldn't be able to survive without the offshore program (Tender fruit grower).

Even in sectors that have been flagging, such as tobacco, industry experts claim that being granted the ability to obtain foreign workers was a positive change that led to an increase in exports by the late 1980s (Ramsey and Smit 2001). The agricultural industry estimates the value of foreign workers to the Canadian economy to be $1 billion and claims that each foreign worker supports 2.2 jobs throughout the supply chain (FARMS 2003). Basok (2002) argues that the survival of horticulture in Ontario hinges on the recruitment of foreign workers, who have become a structural necessity to the industry.

The success of the SAWP in delivering a flexible and competitive source of labor has almost certainly contributed to the growing use of foreign workers under alternative mechanisms, both among employers in the agricultural sector but also in the economy in general. In 2003, the federal government created the Low-Skill Pilot Program, open to any Canadian employers requiring ''unskilled'' labor, including agri-food industries. This program, now more commonly referred to as the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), has since been modified and expanded. Although the federal government does not release information regarding the employers that access this program, my research suggests that four groups of agricultural employers are currently sourcing workers in this way: (1) those producing commod-

ities not included in the SAWP, such as bait worm harvesting and mushrooms, that have traditionally offered higher wages and therefore attracted Canadian workers; (2) those seeking to hire workers from countries outside of the SAWP, sometimes in addition to their SAWP workforce; (3) those that are no longer able to receive SAWP workers because sending countries refuse to supply them due to poor housing and/or working conditions; and (4) those who cannot comply with some of the provisions of the SAWP, such as the provision of on-site housing.[27] The differences between the SAWP and the TFWP are substantial. In brief, the most notable difference is that the newer program is less regulated: it operates outside of bilateral agreements between Canada and the labor-sending countries, freeing employers from the annual negotiations and the levels of government scrutiny built into the SAWP. The TFWP allows approved employers to enter into negotiations directly with workers or labor contractors in the source country, potentially leaving workers beyond government oversight and/or protection.[28] Another important difference is that the TFWP permits approved employers to recruit foreign workers from anywhere in the world, including Thailand or Guatemala at the current time. The TFWP also does not contain any provisions regarding minimum contract length, whereas SAWP employers must provide at least 240 hours over a six-week period. In addition, workers under the TFWP can stay in Canada for up to two years and re-enter after a period of four months outside the country. The TFWP, arguably, affords many of the advantages of the SAWP but at lower cost to the federal government in terms of program establishment and administration.

It is evident that the use of foreign workers is increasing in other sectors of the economy, not only through rising numbers as cited earlier (Sharma 2006) but also the recent proliferation of these new initiatives to supply temporary foreign workers. In addition to the SAWP and a program for live-in caregivers that have been in place for sometime, more recent developments include the Construction Recruitment External Worker Services (CREWS), established in 2001 and a pilot project to supply the meat packing industry, established in 2002. These two programs served as forerunners to the TFWP in 2003. Furthermore, in July 2006 the minister of Citizenship and Immigration

[27] While SAWP employers must provide free seasonal housing, TFWP employers are only required to make an effort to find reasonably priced private accommodation of their workers.

[28] In 2004, when bait worm pickers under the then Low-Skill Pilot Program contacted the press regarding the exploitative labor practices of their employer, the Mexican Consulate was unaware of their presence in the country.

Minister announced a federal initiative aimed at speeding up recruitment of foreign workers through the establishment of ''temporary foreign worker units'' in Calgary and Vancouver to provide advice to employers and streamline worker applications (CIC 2006). Thus, while the focus of this paper has been on the agricultural sector, it is evident that non-citizen labor is becoming an integral element of competitive strategies, supported by federal immigration policy, across an expanding number of sectors seeking more flexible sources of labor.

Conclusions

Changes in the global economy have had profound effects on the social relations of agricultural production throughout the world. These transformations have held significant implications for the ways in which people are incorporated into wage labor. In high income countries, a striking development has been the increasing employment of foreign workers in agricultural labor markets, with notable examples including North Africans in Spain, Eastern Europeans in the United Kingdom, and Latin Americans in the United States. While in this context, the changes taking place in Canada may appear modest at least in terms of the numbers of foreign workers employed, the case provided in this paper provides further illustration of this social phenomenon. Farm operators, facing serious challenges competing for domestic and export markets with the deepening of trade liberalization and the tightening grip of retail concentration, have sought out more flexible labor arrangements as part of their strategies to remain competitive. Foreign workers provided by the Canadian federal government's SAWP have been instrumental to this strategy.

The benefits to growers include an on-site workforce that cannot move out of the sector or even change employers. Given the class background of participants and the limited livelihood alternatives in their home countries, it is also a workforce more likely than domestic workers to accept the eroded working conditions and variable hours characterizing the industry. Moreover, because SAWP workers must migrate as single applicants, leaving their families in their communities of origin, they are also more likely to agree to work longer hours when required. The Program delivers these workers in a more timely fashion than is possible in a freely functioning labor market due to the competition created between remittance-seeking supply countries who vie for farm placements, including on the basis of fulfilling employer requests promptly. Finally, labor supply countries provide considerable administrative support in selecting, dispatching, and disciplining

workers at no cost to employers. Since many of the agricultural supports provided by the Canadian state to growers in terms of their labor needs have long been extinguished, this support is no doubt valuable. It is thus unsurprising that SAWP numbers are rising, that contracts have lengthened, or that growers are instituting strategies to employ farm workers year round; in sum, that the ''seasonal'' or ''temporary'' aspects of the Program beg interrogation.

More fundamentally, the SAWP provides an example of how immigration policy, specifically through temporary visa programs, regulates the labor markets of high income countries and maintains their position within the increasingly competitive global political economy. Foreign workers fill those places in the labor market that most domestic workers with labor mobility and other employment or social welfare options can avoid and, by providing a cheapened and unfree source of labor to their employers, create greater labor market competition in general. While the competitiveness of Canadian horticulture is undoubtedly the result of a number of factors, the availability of temporary visa workers has played a critical and acknowledged role in fueling the dynamism of this industry. Indeed, Canadian horticulture—particularly in greenhouse crops and floriculture—has experienced spectacular growth in recent years, despite intensified competition in global markets. The trend among horticultural enterprises in high income countries to turn to foreign workers in order to remain competitive is an interesting phenomenon that deserves further attention in our understanding of global agri-food networks. A close watch is also needed of other sectors to see if and how the experiences of agriculture are replicated and non-citizen labor becomes integral to the wider political economy.

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