

Migrant workers give the local economy a boost

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The harvest is wrapping up across our region, thanks to all the help of thousands of migrant workers. And as they head back to their families, they're not going back empty handed.

Trinidad native Rick Sookhoo has spent the past 7 months working as a field hand in the Holland Marsh.

"It's a great opportunity to work and save money and Canada is a wonderful place."

Jacoba Martinez is from Mexico and has been working "The Marshes" fields of carrots, onions and beets for 15 years and he doesn't mind the hard work for minimum wage.

"Yes, it is hard work but it is okay, I stay happy, my family too."

Jacoba sends all his money back home to his four children and his wife Antonia.

As the harvest season draws to an end, both migrant workers will return home along with 15,000 others across the province. But before they do, many will go out and shop for items to be sent back home. Something referred to as "Little Christmas."

"The reference refers to the economic value these workers are to the downtown cores of smaller towns," says Jamie Reaume with the Holland Marshes Growers Association.

The impact they have on local business is substantial says restaurant owner Noe Martinez.

"We seem them walking here – groceries, banking. I go outside and talk to them and I miss them."

Migrant workers spend millions of dollars here and on goods to be shipped back home.

Tools are a popular item to send home but electronics are really big. In fact, last year farm owner Avia Eek got a call to pick up Rick from shopping with a truck.

"Why said my husband – because I just bought 22 flat-screen televisions. He's taken them back home to sell. You talk about entrepreneurial spirit – I mean that man has it all together."

Rick and Yacoba say they will be doing a little shopping over the next three weeks for "Little Christmas" to send back home to Trinidad and Mexico. And the duo says they'll be back in the marsh next spring.



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