



British Columbia

Migrant workers complain of overcrowded dorm rooms and agriculture chemical exposure on Kelowna farm



Farm owner denies workers were exposed to crop sprayer and says their lodgings were approved by authorities

[Brady Strachan](#) · CBC News · Posted: Oct 10, 2019 5:32 PM PT | Last Updated: October 10



This Google Street View photo shows the uncompleted migrant workers' lodging building at AM Sandher Farm Ltd. in 2012. (Google Street View)

[comments](#)



Three seasonal migrant workers have launched complaints about their living and working conditions at a farm they were employed at in Kelowna, B.C., with one of them alleging he was

exposed to agricultural chemicals from a crop sprayer.

The workers were brought from Mexico to Canada by A.M. Sandher Farm Ltd. under the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program, said Jorge Siller, a legal advocate with the [Migrant Workers Centre](#).

The owner of the farm denies the claims.

Crowded living space

The workers allege their employer housed 10 labourers in a dorm room located in a lodging building on the farm property where they slept in five double bunk beds, according to Siller.

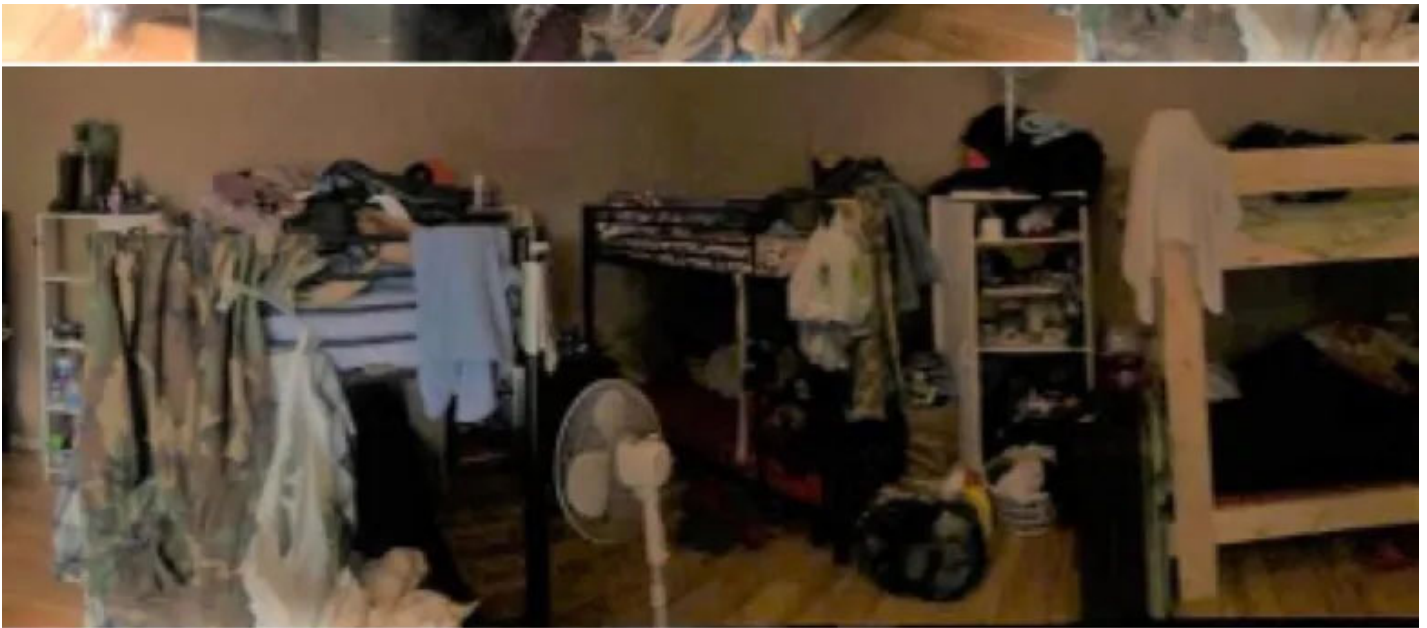
They filed their complaints with Siller before returning to Mexico earlier this week.

- [A glimpse into the lives of migrant workers on an Abbotsford, B.C., farm](#)
- [Away from their kids, foreign workers in the Lower Mainland celebrate Father's Day](#)

"It's a sad situation to see those kinds of conditions here in Canada," Siller said. "The lack of space is really clear. They don't have anywhere to store their property."

[Provincial guidelines for housing temporary farm workers](#) stipulate a minimum floor area per person of 7.44 square meters with a minimum of 8.5 cubic meters of air space per person in the sleeping area.





A panoramic photo taken by migrant workers of crowded conditions in their dorm room at A.M. Sandher Farm Ltd. in Kelowna, B.C. (Migrant Workers Centre)

The workers provided photos of their dorm room to Siller and CBC News showing five bunk beds in a room along with a cluttered chest of drawers and shelving units.

"You can imagine in summer time how hot and how hard [it is] to get proper rest and privacy in that overcrowded space," Siller said.

Exposure to agricultural chemicals

One of the men Siller is representing claimed he was exposed to unknown agricultural chemicals on several occasions from a tractor sprayer that he said was operating in an area of the farm where he was working.

Siller said his client asked the employer for safety equipment such as a mask and safety goggles but was denied the request.

"They were sent to work the crops that just recently had been sprayed," Siller said. "Sometimes, the tractor is going in the same row, and they are just working in T-shirts."

Workers also complained of a lack of available drinking water in some of the field locations and having to attend a training session on their day off which they said they were not compensated for.





A still from a video taken by a migrant worker purportedly showing a tractor and sprayer working in the same crop row as he is on at A.M. Sandher Farm Ltd. in Kelowna, B.C. (Migrant Workers Center)

The allegations are detailed in formal complaints Siller has filed with WorkSafeBC and the Regional District of the Central Okanagan (RDCO).

In an email, a spokesperson for WorkSafeBC wrote the organization is looking into the complaint.

The RDCO said it is sending a building inspector to the farm to look at the workers' lodgings.

Farm denies the complaints

Farm owner Sukhwant Sandher told CBC News she and her husband Gurjinder employ 32 migrant workers.

Sandher said the farm has brought in foreign workers for the past four years and every year the lodging was inspected by authorities.

She denied the overcrowding claim and explained workers had moved an extra bunk bed into the dorm room.

Sander also denied workers were exposed to agricultural chemicals saying they had been instructed to stay away from areas of the farm that were being sprayed.

©2019 CBC/Radio-Canada. All rights reserved.

Visitez Radio-Canada.ca