

Atlantic Metropolis Centre ~ Working Paper Series
Centre Métropolis Atlantique ~ Série de documents de recherche

***Double Precarity: Experiences of Former Seasonal Agricultural
Workers Who Settle in Rural Nova Scotia***

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July 2012



Centre Métropolis Atlantique
Atlantic Metropolis Centre

The Atlantic Metropolis Centre's Working Papers Series
Série de documents de recherche du Centre Métropolis Atlantique

Working Paper No.46-2012
Série de documents de recherche 46-2012

The Atlantic Metropolis Centre's Working Papers Series
Série de documents de recherche du Centre Métropolis Atlantique

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Abstract

The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) has grown substantially since its inception in 1966. Between 2006 and 2010, the number of temporary foreign workers entering Nova Scotia under this program almost tripled, a rate of growth that far outstripped the national average. This is also significantly higher than the rates of growth in Ontario and British Columbia, where most research on the SAWP has been conducted. By focusing on Nova Scotia, we address key gaps in existing research. We offer a glimpse into the experiences of former participants in the SAWP in Nova Scotia who have transitioned to permanent residency through a small series of in-depth interviews. We focus in particular on the opportunities—or lack thereof—for the development of off-farm informal social ties with rural Nova Scotians, and on pathways to permanent residency. We find that the patterns of social and spatial isolation of migrant workers identified by research in other provinces are replicated in Nova Scotia, but are compounded by the small size and the relative isolation of their work sites. We also note the key role played by former SAWP participants who have transitioned to permanent residency in buffering against total isolation. Echoing previous research, we conclude with a range of recommendations around housing, working conditions, and employment and visa restrictions. We also make recommendations that enhance opportunities for developing stronger social ties between migrant workers and the rural Nova Scotian communities where they work.¹

Key words: temporary foreign workers, seasonal agriculture worker program, rural communities, isolation, permanent residency.

¹ This research was supported by an Atlantic Metropolis Centre Pilot Project Grant and the Dean of Research and Graduate Studies at Acadia University. We would like to thank Kathy Blackman, Emily Duffett and Emma Van Rooyen for their research assistance. Thanks also to members of the Canadian Network for Critical Sociology for their feedback. Special thanks to our research participants for taking the time to share their experiences.

Introduction

Canadian immigration policy has long been directed towards addressing labour shortages. The pathways to permanent residency that would at one time have been relatively straightforward for immigrant labourers are now becoming increasingly complex and heavily regulated. Canadian immigration policy, then, is currently in a period of retrenchment (Kelly & Trebilcock 2010). This is especially the case for lower-skilled migrants who have the right to enter Canada for work, but only on a temporary basis (Sharma 2006). The ranks of temporary foreign workers in Canada have grown at an unprecedented rate over the last 25 years, from 120,074 in 1986 to 432,682 in 2010 (CIC 2011), which constitutes an increase of over 260%. To put this in broader context, the total population of Canada grew by just over 30% in the same period. Thus, the rate of growth of the temporary foreign worker population in Canada between 1986 and 2010 was almost nine times that of the Canadian population. The growing presence of temporary foreign workers poses many acute questions about the social, political and legal contours of Canada's immigration system, in particular for those in the lower-skill classes. This is because the pathways to permanent residency that have more traditionally been open to immigrants to Canada are generally not available to temporary foreign workers, especially those who come as seasonal agricultural workers.

There is a pressing need to consider how the uncertainty framing the legal and employment status of temporary foreign workers—what we call their *doubly precarious* situation—is institutionally produced, socially practiced and individually experienced. To this end, this paper responds to the clear need for further research on the multifold dimensions of Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program by concentrating on the relatively small but growing presence of seasonal agricultural workers in Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley. This paper contributes to existing research by examining a specific community of migrant workers

that has not been addressed in existing research, with a particular emphasis upon the dynamics of their participation in and socialization into the wider community. We highlight the experiences of these migrant workers and examine the kinds of informal ties that they developed in their time working ‘on the contract’. Specifically, our research considers the experiences of former seasonal agricultural workers who lived and worked in the Annapolis Valley, and who have made (or are making) the transition to permanent residency or Canadian citizenship. Based on interview data, we outline the types of social networks and opportunities for creating informal social ties that our interview participants developed during their time as seasonal agricultural workers in rural Nova Scotia, and, more pointedly, we determine the key barriers to the further expansion of community ties that they experienced. We conclude by drawing on our research findings to suggest areas for future research as well as policy recommendations.

Migrant farm workers are particularly vulnerable within the immigration system, and a stronger understanding of these features of their experience is crucial, both to draw attention to the complex interplay of immigration policy with labour rights, human rights and social contexts, and to facilitate initiatives that can mitigate the risks associated with their doubly precarious situation. Because they have “no right to circulate on the labour market” (Binford 2009: 507) and their immigration status is contingent on their employer, migrant farm workers are particularly vulnerable, both as immigrants and as workers. Below we demonstrate some of the operations and consequences of this double precarity.

Temporary Foreign Workers, Precarious Labour and Transformations in Canada’s Immigration Profile

This section provides an overview of the research on, first, the general category of temporary foreign workers in Canada, and, second, the more specific class of seasonal

agricultural workersⁱ who come to Canada under the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP). This review summarizes the strengths and contributions of the existing literature, with a specific focus on seasonal agricultural workers in Nova Scotia, a smaller but growing destination in Canada. This section highlights a need for more research on the following areas: 1) seasonal agricultural workers in specific communities and provinces, particularly outside of Ontario; 2) seasonal agricultural workers and the dynamics of social integration and social well-being; 3) the social bonds and integration experiences of former migrant farm workers who have since become permanent residents.

The Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) is characterized as a demand-based program; there are no restrictions on the number of people admitted, and as we demonstrated in our introduction, these numbers have expanded rapidly over the last two decades. A broad range of work falls under TFWP, from professionals hired abroad specifically because of their expertise, to athletes and entertainers, to international student graduates from Canadian universities, to lower-wage and lower-skill workers, such as caregivers and agricultural labourers. The diversity of participants alone challenges how to assess or analyse the implications of this pool of labour on Canadian employment and immigration in a clear way.

Temporary foreign workers, especially lower skilled workers, contradict conventional understandings of immigration as the acquisition of permanent residency. As Nakache and Kinoshita argue, “Canada’s rules on the legal status of migrants admitted for employment have been largely structured according to one policy model for lower-skilled workers, to discourage integration, and two simultaneous models for skilled workers, to both discourage and assist their eventual integration (2010 p. 39). Or, as the 2009 Fall Report of the Auditor General notes regarding the TFWP, “[v]arious studies and reports over the years have recognized that lower-skilled temporary foreign workers entering Canada may be vulnerable to exploitation or poor

working conditions, usually because of their economic conditions, linguistic isolation, and limited understanding of their rights” (2.108).

As this category of immigration and labour grows, so, too, does the dedicated research on temporary foreign workers. In this regard, a number of key concerns emerge. First, more and more attention has been devoted to issues of labour rights, human rights and exploitation (Bakan and Stasiulis 1997; Basok 2004; Goldring, Berinstein and Bernhard 2009; Nakache and Kinoshita 2010; Preibisch and Hennebry 2011; Sharma 2006). There is the general recognition that migrant workers occupy an ambiguous status in terms of the rights of citizenship that is inseparable from national and global economic and political contexts, and in a manner that demonstrates the increasing complexity of migratory status as shaped by shifting labour trends and global markets (Vosko 2006, 2010). Canada’s increased reliance on migrant workers represents the growing validation of precarity within the labour market, the immigration system and the economy more broadly. In this respect, as Goldring, Berinstein and Bernhard (2009) argue, temporary foreign workers in Canada are part of a growing category based on ‘precarious legal status’, one that highlights that the divide between legal and illegal resident is not so clear cut; instead, we have, “the systemic, legal and normalized production of a *range* of precarious, or less than full, im/migration statuses” (p. 243). Layered on top of migrant workers’ precarious legal status as immigrants is the precarious nature of their employment. Vosko defines precarious employment as “work for remuneration characterized by uncertainty, low income, and limited social benefits and statutory entitlements” (2010, p. 2). As she explains, there are a range of factors that shape precarious employment: employment status; form of employment; labour market insecurity; social context and social location. These factors make clear the need to understand not only production of precarity through a series of legal, economic, institutional and social practices, but also the experiences of those in doubly precarious situations.

Various research reports have targeted the numerous contradictions, if not clear injustices, produced by various temporary foreign worker programs (e.g. Hennebry 2012; Hennebry, Preibisch and McLaughlin 2010; McLaughlin 2007; Nakache and Kinoshita 2010; Quebec Commission for Human Rights and Youth Rights 2011; United Food and Commercial Workers Canada 2002, 2006). Take, for example, the case of work permits that restrict a migrant worker to a single employer, and thus, prevent, for fear of loss of employment, lodging a complaint about working conditions or pursuing needed medical attention. Along a similar vein, there is little weight behind the actual enforcement of employer obligations or evaluation of compliance with provincial labour laws. Adding to the complications, it is the federal government who deems an employer appropriate, but the provincial government who is responsible for ensuring compliance with labour laws. Or, to cite another issue, the government takes deductions for Employment Insurance (EI) and Canada Pension Plan (CPP) even though many temporary workers are unable to qualify for these benefits. Further, the system favours higher skilled workers in terms of pathways to permanent residency and family unity. Lower skilled workers' immigration status is heavily circumscribed and their employment contract is tightly constrained.

In general, most recommendations in the existing literature hinge on bridging the distance between theoretical rights and protections afforded to temporary workers, and the persistent barriers and limitations that confront them. For example, Nakache and Kinoshita (2010) recommend the following actions to better ensure the protection of foreign workers' human rights: the granting of permits that allow for migrant mobility; stronger inter-governmental communication; policy development and services to support the integration of foreign workers; monitoring of employers and enforcement of regulations; more public awareness and discourse.

Or, for example, a recent report by Jenna Hennebry (2012) proposes a Labour Migrant Integration Scale as a mechanism for measuring the multi-fold impact of temporary migration programs, and a number of policy and program recommendations to support migrant farm worker integration, such as: greater autonomy for workers; multiple-entry visas; access to visas or work permits for family members; improved communication and transportation access; increased monitoring and compliance of housing and workplace safety (p. 34).

Since there is general consensus in the literature that lower-skill workers, such as domestic workers and agricultural workers, are most vulnerable to the limitations outlined above, and in the interest of furthering research on those classes of foreign labour most deleteriously impacted by both policy and practice, this report concentrates specifically on seasonal agricultural workers who have settled in Nova Scotia by becoming permanent residents.

Contexts and Communities: The Seasonal Agriculture Worker Program in Nova Scotia

The total number of temporary foreign workers entering Nova Scotia rose from 1495 to 2505 between 2005 and 2010, with just under 45% of these located outside Halifax in each of these two years (CIC 2010). Notably, there are more people entering the province as temporary workers than as permanent residents, and the fastest growing category within this temporary labour pool are those with a Labour Market Opinion (LMO). Employers are granted an LMO once they have satisfied the government that there are insufficient Canadian workers to fill the necessary positions. Employers must demonstrate that they have directed training and recruitment efforts first towards Canadian workers. In addition, they must pay wages that are consistent with regional rates for the job, they must offer working conditions that conform to provincial standards, and lastly, they must identify any benefits a foreign worker might contribute. The most common LMOs are for information technology workers, live-in caregivers,

seasonal agricultural workers and workers entering through the Pilot Project for Occupations Requiring Lower Levels of Formal Training (commonly referred to as the Low Skill Pilot Project). In contrast to the more stable numbers within the other sub-categories, LMO workers have more than doubled from 2005 to 2009 in Nova Scotia, with a sharp increase from 2008 to 2009 (ISIS 2011). As with lower-skilled temporary workers elsewhere in Canada, these workers are more susceptible to exploitation, and many may be unclear about their rights, thus making them more prone to various forms of social and physical isolation.

This report concentrates on a specific type of migrant worker in Nova Scotia, seasonal agricultural workers, who have entered the province through the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program. Currently, seasonal agricultural workers come to Canada under two main programs: the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) and the Low Skill Pilot Project (LSPP)ⁱⁱ. The SAWP, which is the traditional entry program for migrant agricultural workers, started in 1966, following a Memorandum of Understanding between the Canadian and Jamaican governments in 1962. Through the 1960s and early 70s the Program was expanded to incorporate other English-speaking Caribbean countries (Binford 2009). In 1974, the SAWP was expanded from Caribbean countries to include Mexico, in part, to provide a check on the growing negotiating power of Caribbean workers (Satzewich 2007). Additionally, Nandita Sharma has noted that the Canadian Non-Immigrant Employment Authorization Program—an umbrella for various programs including the SAWP—which was introduced in 1973, has worked to transition immigration policy “away from a policy of permanent immigrant settlement towards an increasing reliance on temporary migrant workers” (2006, p.20). Today, the SAWP admits temporary workers from Mexico and select Caribbean nations, for on farm work. Under the SAWP, workers may come from the following places: Mexico, Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda,

Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts-Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, and Trinidad and Tobago.

The number of migrant workers entering Nova Scotia under the SAWP almost tripled between 2006 and 2010, from 322 to 895. Over the same period the total number of workers entering Canada through the SAWP grew from 24,050 to 27,835, a growth rate of less than 16%. Though the actual number of workers in Nova Scotia remains relatively modest compared to Ontario, the *rate* of growth of this program in Nova Scotia outstripped the national rate and the rate of all other provinces (based on Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) 2010; 2011). It is worth noting that this has occurred in the context of very modest population growth in Nova Scotia, and continuing rural depopulation in the province over the same period.

Under the SAWP, the employer must offer a minimum of 240 hours of work within a period of six weeks or less, to a maximum duration of eight months work between January 1 and December 15. These cut-off dates ensure that continuity of residency is unavailable to workers. The employer must provide “adequate” seasonal housing for the workers and the workers must live on site (though this rule has recently been relaxed) and their work permits are tied to a specific employer. Hourly wages for the program are set by HRSDC according to the commodity, and generally tied to the minimum wage rates of the participating provinces. Some areas (e.g. Dairy, Poultry, Swine) will have a lower skill wage bracket and a higher skill wage bracket (whose rate varies between provinces). For example, Nova Scotia offers two dollars above minimum wage per hour for the higher skill positions. The impact of the new wage structure for the Temporary Foreign Worker Program announced by HRSDC in May 2012 is still unclear.

Standard deductions apply to the employees pay, such as EI, CPP and income tax, and the employer may also deduct the cost of the work visa and a portion of the air travel. While many of the regulations are set federally, there are small provincial variations in the allowable payroll deductions. In Nova Scotia, for example, workers are not eligible for provincial medical insurance; instead, private coverage is offered for Mexican workers through one insurer at the cost of 94 cents per work day (HRSDC 2012b). The regulations for Caribbean workers are notably different; there is a 25% wage deduction that covers “administration fees and a mandatory personal savings fund”, what the workers call “compulsory savings”. HRSDC does not detail how much of this percentage goes toward administration costs and medical coverage, and how much is earmarked for savings, nor are the mechanisms through which workers recoup these savings on their return to their home countries entirely clear. Some of our research participants reported both further deductions in their home countries and delays in receiving these savings, though this was inconsistent across interviews.

Since more than half of all SAWP participants work in Ontario, most of the literature concentrates on Ontario examples and case studies (e.g. Basok 2002, 2004; Binford 2002; Hennebry, Preibisch and McLaughlin 2010; McLaughlin 2009; Preibisch 2003, 2004). However, we are also wise to pay attention to shared and distinct features of migrant labourers’ experiences in other provinces, particularly with the rapid expansion of this type of migrant labour in Nova Scotia. In this respect, there are a number of issues that impact temporary agricultural workers in Nova Scotia as with seasonal agricultural workers elsewhere in Canada, and there are a number of concerns specific to Nova Scotia.

The concerns outlined above with regard to the TFWP in general, are in the SAWP. Precarity becomes formalized through both participants’ employment and immigration status. For example, with work permits and residence—not to mention the possibility of renewal—tied

to one employer, uncertainty and insecurity are very clearly built into the employer-employee relationship. In terms of immigration status, yearly employment periods are restricted to eight months per year, but workers often return year after year. As Hennebry (2012) notes of her survey of nearly 600 migrant farm workers in Ontario, the average length of participation in the SAWP was 7 to 9 years (13); with workers in a state of “permanent temporariness,” (12) SAWP is best characterized a “circular migration system” (13). Of all the classes of TFW, SAWP participants have almost no opportunity (barring family sponsorship) to secure, if desired, permanent residency.ⁱⁱⁱ

As noted above, because of the relative instability of their legal status and their right to work, participants in the SAWP are doubly precarious. Their options are heavily circumscribed, as not only their jobs, but their continued presence in Canada, is contingent upon maintaining good relations with their employer. As Satzewich notes “[T]he mobility rights that Canadian citizens and permanent residents have as a result of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms are denied to these [seasonal agricultural] workers. If workers quit or change jobs without permissionthey are subject to deportation. As a result, these workers face extra-economic coercion to remain in the jobs for which they were originally recruited. From an employer’s perspective, these workers are an ideal solution to recurring labour force recruitment and retention problems” (2008, p.261).

As the literature has well established (Basok 2002, 2004; Colby 1997; Hennebry 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b; McLaughlin 2007; 2009; Preibisch 2003, 2004; Preibisch and Hennebry 2011; Preibisch and Binford 2007; Satzewich 1991), other concerns with the implications of the SAWP for participants’ employment conditions, legal rights, physical, mental and social well-being include: access to health care services; eligibility for benefits; workplace safety, weak enforcement of labour codes and poor employer monitoring; language and literacy

barriers; family separation; geographical isolation; poor or unsafe transportation; social exclusion, discrimination and racism.

Within this vein, and in light of the growing recognition of the importance of the social dimensions of migrant farmers' experiences and processes of social integration (Hennebry, 2012; Preibisch 2003, 2004; Sharma 2001), this report highlights the need for more attention to the social landscapes, informal interactions and non-working relationships of seasonal workers, with an eye to better understanding the relationship between these workers and the communities within which they are located. In this sense, the fact that various features of the SAWP raise serious social, political and policy questions is now beyond dispute. However, to further enhance the existing literature and its probing of the multi-fold question of rights, this research starts from the position that we can better mitigate the risks associated with double precarity by enhancing our understanding the interplay of labour rights and human rights within local social contexts. Thus, while the above literature indicates important general concerns, how these factors co-mingle in specific regions with distinct socio-economic-cultural contexts becomes important to creating a more nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of seasonal agricultural workers within different parts of Canada; we do not want to rely on a homogenous picture of the experiences of this class of temporary foreign workers. In order to better understand different migrant worker populations in different regions and to encourage policy change, we must consider the particularities of each area. This becomes more urgent given that concerns regarding the treatment of temporary foreign workers in Nova Scotia in particular are starting to surface (Beaumont, 2011).

In Nova Scotia, there are some distinct features to consider. Ontario's rural areas and small towns (such as Bradford, Leamington, Simcoe, Chatam, Niagara-on-the-lake) receive upwards of 20,000 temporary migrants every year. At 895 in 2010, the total population of

workers in Nova Scotia is relatively small. This means that workers both “stand-out” more, and are prone to be more socially and culturally isolated. Second, and related to the first, with a much smaller population and less immigration, Nova Scotia is less racially and ethnically diverse than Ontario. Thus, workers are even more visibly marked as different in the rural communities in which they arrive. Third, building on the first two points, there are not the same goods and services available that tend to emerge once temporary worker populations become well established by a seasonal presence year over year. For example, in Ontario communities that have grown accustomed to the regular influx of workers, features like Catholic services in Spanish are offered, and local supermarkets begin to stock authentic Mexican and Caribbean grocery items (Preibisch 2003). Furthermore, community organizations emerge to offer support to workers and advocate for stronger rights and protections. For example, in Ontario groups such as Justicia for Migrant Workers (J4MW), the Niagara Migrant Workers Interest Group (NMIWG) or the Chatham-Kent Committee for Migrant Workers (CKCMW) have formed to address the very specific needs of this temporary population. Thus, overall, and as the data to be discussed below will elaborate, the experiences of seasonal agricultural workers in Nova Scotia, while similar to those of workers in Ontario in many respects, differ in some significant ways.

In what follows, we consider the experiences of seasonal agricultural workers who lived and worked in Nova Scotia’s Annapolis Valley, and who have made the transition to landed immigrant status. We highlight the experiences of these men as migrant workers and examine the kinds of informal ties that they developed in their time working ‘on the contract’. We conclude by drawing on our research findings to suggest areas for future research as well as policy priorities.

Method

The data for this paper is based on a series of qualitative interviews with former seasonal agricultural workers in rural Nova Scotia, who have since acquired permanent residency through their Canadian spouses and settled in or near the rural Nova Scotian communities where they once worked as temporary foreign workers. Permission to conduct interviews for this project was granted by the Acadia University Research Ethics Board. Given that this is a relatively isolated, dispersed and hard-to-reach population, it was only possible to use non-probability sampling. We used a mixture of snowball and purposive sampling, drawing on existing contacts in the former seasonal agricultural worker community and asking those we interviewed if they knew of other former participants in the SAWP who had settled in rural Nova Scotia. Each participant has been given a pseudonym and any details that might reveal their identity have been removed. All participants were interviewed at a time and place of their choosing, which in all cases ended up being their home or the home of another participant. Research participants were offered a small honorarium for sharing their experiences with us.

Those we interviewed were men who had spent from three to eight years as seasonal agricultural workers between the early 1990s and 2010. Two had also worked in Ontario before coming to Nova Scotia. All participants settled in Nova Scotia because they had married Canadian citizens. A total of six in-depth interviews were conducted, each lasting between 40 minutes and 2 hours. All interviews were conducted in English. An interview guide was created to ensure coverage of major themes, subsections had specific questions aimed at fact gathering, but interviews revolved mostly around soliciting stories and accounts of particular experiences from our research participants. Thus, beyond basic factual information, interview questions were open-ended and the interviewer probed with further questions where participants' accounts required elaboration and/or clarification. Interviews were transcribed and open coded by hand.

This generated 18 themes which were grouped together under three broader themes. These themes were then used for closed coding. While our sample cannot be taken to be representative, we are confident that the issues raised and the similarities across the experiences of our participants point to consistencies in the experiences of former and current migrant farm workers in Nova Scotia. Significantly, our research identified a number of major impediments to the development of links to local communities, specifically, factors connected to work, location and transportation that impacted workers' ability to informally socialize with rural Nova Scotians.

Our emphasis on interviewing former seasonal agricultural workers comes with some advantages. Given the features of the system that make these workers particularly vulnerable, former workers whose immigration status is now more secure are able to speak without fear of repercussions: current workers might have felt uncomfortable or conflicted about participating in an interview. Further, since very few migrant workers are able to apply for permanent status, the capacity to compare the conditions of temporary versus permanent residency helps to highlight the development of social ties and community that most interest us. We recognize the limitation that our research was unable to reach workers who might have settled in rural Nova Scotia, but who have few or no former workers in their social network.

From *the* right to work in Canada to 'right to work' in the fields of the Annapolis Valley

Yeah, it was hard, to tell you the truth, it was hard the first season. It was hard, all the changes you had to go through, all the changes. (Joe)²

In what follows, we outline participants' recounting of their working lives, housing conditions, relationship with their employers and their leisure time both on and off-farm. What emerges is a broader account of an array of barriers to the development of informal ties with

² All quotes have been minimally edited to increase readability.

members of the wider rural Nova Scotian communities in which they work. For those who have transitioned from temporary to permanent residency, the initial dearth of close informal ties to the community more broadly tends to continue, and when it has been overcome, community bonds are generally initiated and mediated through their Canadian citizen spouses. The deeper consequences of double precarity in work and immigration status, as discussed earlier, become tangible in this section through identifiable impediments to the development of social ties and participation in the wider community: employment demands (work hours, housing); location (geographical separation from community, services); transportation (inaccessibility of community, separation).

Interviews started by asking participants about how they came to hear about and get involved with the SAWP initially. For some participants, their original decision to come to Canada came about because of the recommendations of a family member or friend who had already come to Canada:

My next door neighbour...He was on the program for 5 years, and I was just home doing nothing. He just said to me I got something for you to do and he signed me up and then the next week I took my medicals, and 2 days after I was flying! (Lee)

My brother was on the program, that's how I heard of it.... (Peter)

However, this is not to say that all of our participants had some inside knowledge of what was involved through contact with previous participants. Initial encounters with the program were relatively unplanned, with several interviewees noting that, while they may have known something about the program, their initial decisions to enter the SAWP occurred casually rather than with any carefully laid out preparation:

I was doing my own thing when I heard about the contract. I always knew about it and then they came on the television that they were looking for guys, I went to sign up.....So they were telling us down there how you can work for a lot of money; you got to be healthy, you got to be this you got to be that.... you go in for an interview and they find out about you, what kind of work

skills you have, education....medical history. Then they sign you up for a physical and medical through the doctors..... Then I got a call. I came over.
(Joe)

Another participant alluded to the fact that local politicians in the Caribbean engaged in a form of clientelism, offering constituents the opportunity to work abroad through a form of political brokerage. While the veracity of such claims might be hard to establish, even the rumour, if not truth, to such assertions paints seasonal work in Canada as a scarce and desirable resource.

For others, the work itself was a draw, particularly the prospect of being paid comparatively well to work outside:

we were going through a recession back home and I lost my job....I'm a farm worker. I love to do farm work. I like to get air. I don't like to be inside. I did that for 10 years back home. So that's one of those things made me look at working on farm contract. That's why I got my papers fast because, you know, I was a good worker. (Chris)

So, while participants identified a number of factors that made the prospect of agricultural work in Canada appealing. But as we will discuss later, despite the initial attraction, agricultural work in Canada did not retain its appeal over time for our interviewees.

Everyday Life

All participants came to Nova Scotia on flights from the Caribbean with between six and fifteen other agricultural workers. None of our interview participants knew any of the workers that they travelled with in advance of their first contract^{iv}.

Nobody. I meet guys after I come out here, from back home who was down here. But at start I didn't know nobody (Peter)

When I came I didn't know no one... there was fourteen of us [on the flight], not one. (Michael)

No, they was from a different district than me. (Joe)

No, I didn't know nobody. (Chris)

Upon arrival, farmers had arranged to pick the workers up from the airport in vans to bring them right to the farms where they would spend the vast majority of their time in Canada. First they would drop their belongings at the on-farm ‘bunkhouse’ and then go right to the nearest bank to set up accounts. All participants expressed surprise at the fact that they were expected to work within hours of their arrival in Canada:

Oh my god, we land, we got here in the morning, I can’t remember what time now. But anyhow, he sent us off to the bank to get our banking done. And came back to the farm, we thought, we flew from Barbados, like, five and a half hours, then two and a half hours here, you’re jet lagged ... oh no.....Get out there and go weeding! [laughs] (Joe)

This signalled a taste of what their time working ‘on the contract’ would be like: long hours and farmer expectations of a consistently fast work rate. When asked in general terms about their experiences doing agricultural work, all participants spoke about the heavy workload and their initial difficulties in coming to terms with the fact that they were expected to work outdoors in all weather.

Workin’ here is different to home..... one of the biggest things I had, if it is raining you still got to work. And we wasn’t accustomed to that. (Michael)

Workin’ seven days, rainfall, sun shine. Sun gets really really hot but you still got to be out there. (Lee)

Days we work, we get up at 6 o’clock. Out the door at 6:30 in the ground for 7 o’clock. Sometimes we don’t leave the ground ‘til the sun fall. Long hours. And that’s just for planting... in the harvest season, when cuttin’ the vegetables, longer hours, then we cut lettuce and zucchini and all that stuff all day going into the night and then instead of going in and going home you go in the barn and packin’ all that up in boxes (Bob)

Yeah (laughs) it was a lot a lot of back bending. A lot! (Peter)

And then, when you get out of there you work till about 8.30, 9 then you got to come home and get something to eat, get a bath then off to bed. (Joe)

Participants tended to partially frame their long working hours as an inescapable problem of Canada’s shorter growing season:

...in this country farmers got to get their crops in, that’s one of the biggest things here, ‘cause some crops only got 2, 3, 4 months, so you have to get them in. (Chris)

They [the farmers] have to get crops in, and that's one of the things about coming to this country, you have 4 seasons right? ...in the Caribbean we only do one season. (Joe)

This unavoidable environmental fact clearly impacted the work situation. Additionally though, mechanization posed a particular problem:

Well say some crops you got at least eight guys behind you in the machine, and the other eight guys they had to cut my row and cut to the guy next to me 'cause he couldn't keep up and the machine would just go ahead and if you don't help him, you got to go back and cut all that again. That's a lot of hard work. (Peter)

Some participants felt that the farmers generally expected too much from workers:

Basically the farmer program is good to work, but the farmers is work them to the bone. I don't think farmers set out to be bad, but it's their welfare, their living. They got to get their stuff in. (Michael)

...as you go along you learn to live with that. You get to know that, yes, it have to be done. Yes, there is lenience, but sometimes they don't want to give it [laughs] sometimes him don't want to say you can take 5 now....you can't take 5, can't take it (Chris)

That said, it is important not to overstate the extent to which participants spoke negatively about their employers. While all participants spent some time discussing the heavy workload, participants were loath to speak ill of the farmers for whom they worked. By and large, all spoke in positive terms, recounting what they perceived to be acts of kindness on the part of their employers to demonstrate the nature of their working relations. Simple acts of kindness on the part of farmers were generally interpreted in very positive ways, especially on days where workers were permitted to finish early (remember that their wages are hourly), or where the employer gave some small token of appreciation:

Sometime [the boss] will come here and say 'guys, today we really don't have to push it that much, sowork 'til 1 or 'til 3'. That was nice. (Michael)

One time him gave me a case of beer..... for working good...when the sun was hot..... that was a nice drink for the guys. (laughs).....nice when they do something like that, take the stress off. (Chris)

While explicit statements about relationships with employers were positive, further probing revealed some deeper on-farm problems with a chain effect that penetrated all elements

of workers' lives in Canada. For example, some farmers instituted curfews so that workers could not stay out late socializing. This also meant that workers could not stay over with someone they might meet while out socializing 'in town' on a Saturday night.

Well, there are rules that you're not supposed to stay out. There's curfew after certain times at night, not supposed to be off the farm after.this come down from liaison office....can't remember if it's 10, between 9 and 10 something like that, must be on the farm. No visitors and stuff like that. (Joe)

No [laughs] yeah, they're very strict. The farmers really want you to do your work ...once you do your work, he would tell me, we work good during the week on a Saturday he would come out tell me like, he want 300 or 400 box packed up. Then said have the rest of day off. So then he say go out, but not too long. Can have friend come around, he don't mind, but long as don't sleep here it's fine. (Michael)

Him said by 12 o'clock he wants everyone in, you know, go out meet friends, feel good, but be back. (Bob)

The possibility of being sent home for raising the ire of the farmer clearly played a key role in keeping workers in check:

if you do something wrong and the boss doesn't like it then he call the liaison, the boss says this guy ain't getting it, and I don't need him. So then he set up a flight, send him home, replace him with someone else. (Chris)

Consequently, no participant had tested this curfew and the consequences for breaching it. Whether or not a formal curfew was in place, participants noted that the majority of their fellow workers rarely stayed out past 11pm and never stayed out past midnight. In her discussion of Mexican migrant labour in Canada, Binford (2009) has noted that this sort of 'interior conditioning' arises in part because the program is structured in a way that farmers can request specific workers again in the future. This means that, in general, workers do not wish to stand out to their boss for anything but hard work and subservience. More broadly, the concerns about workers abandoning their jobs and immigrating illegally that animates much public discourse around migrant labour in the US is largely absent in Canada. Basok (2000) has argued

that the paternalistic nature of relations between farmers and workers in Canada tends to mitigate against failure to return to host countries.

The temporal constraints placed on workers by virtue of long working hours, curfews and restricted leisure time were matched by spatial constraints connected to their housing. Just as restrictive as curfews (whether implied or explicit) were the impediments living conditions placed on workers' capacity to use their free time as they wished. Here there are two dimensions of note: 1) the interior space of the bunkhouse; 2) the location of housing away from local population clusters.

Conditions in bunkhouses were generally poor and often overcrowded:

....you get put in a house, and that was disgusting, cause that's not how we live in Barbados. Oh my god. Musty smelling. Like dogs, smells awful (Joe)

2-3 guys in a little room, single beds (Peter)

You got at least six or eight men in the bunkhouse (Chris)

Overcrowding, while easy to name, requires closer scrutiny to fully understand its consequences for the development of workers' off-farm lives. In particular, the number of people sharing washroom and kitchen facilities meant that workers had to sacrifice sleep in order to use the kitchen, or that free time at the end of the day and on weekends was spent waiting:

You got to get up 5.30 in the mornin', six or seven guys in one trailer, so everybody can't get up at the same time (Bob)

Yeah, like get up 5.30, two guys come out to use the stove, and use the washroom. Then two more guys start gettin' their lunch together (Michael)

What time we have is on Sundays. If we get it it's on a Sunday. But on Sunday you've got to wash your clothes, cook your food and what not, try to get a two or three hours sleep. By the time you do that it's time for work again 'cause you got at least six or eight men in the bunkhouse, got one stove. Each buddy got a separate thing to cook, everybody can't use the stove at once, so just waitin' (Chris)

Rush rush rush ... sometimes I got to cook my food, when I cook my food I cook food for 2 days, cause it is more easy for me to cook food for 2 days than cookin' every day. Otherwise you waitin', waitin' every day (Peter)

Within a much broader frame of reference, the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia (AHANS) 2011 report, “Housing Nova Scotians: A Fresh Look”, based on a series of consultations with groups across the province to assess problems with the existing stock of housing in Nova Scotia, specifically cites the conditions of migrant workers’ housing in the Annapolis Valley:

In the Valley, there is an urgent, unmet need for rental housing to serve the affordable housing needs of migrant, seasonal farm workers. However, zoning restrictions and community resistance present formidable barriers to efforts to address this particular shortfall. (2011: 21).

All of the former workers interviewed on this project lived in employer provided housing of varying quality (from older farm houses to trailers and farm outbuildings), and while the AHANS report does not specify the exact locations of these needs, or the nature of the community resistance, it is clear that the condition of on-farm housing that migrant farm workers live in must be addressed.

As demonstrated above, then, any leisure time that workers had was almost entirely organized by the elaborately intertwined nexus of work and living situations in the bunkhouse. Layered on top of issues with housing quality, because the bunkhouses were located on the farms where the participants worked and were relatively far away from local towns, workers were dependent on their employers or on the one farmer-designated driver from amongst their colleagues for transportation to do their provisioning. All participants discussed the time constraints placed on them, noting in particular problems with weekly trips to cash pay cheques, send money to family back home and do weekly provisioning. Here, again, free time was spent either waiting or rushing:

The thing about shopping too is the farmer will give us only sometimes an hour, two hours on a Friday to shop. We’ll be scrambling to get what we got to get. In that time, if you want to go and buy groceries, you got to go to the

bank, and change the cheque, and by the time you get in the bank, sometimes half an hour, 45 minutes before you get to a teller, you know, so many guys, so then when you get to town you only got an hour to shop. Not enough time. (Bob)

that's another thing too, we never really used to get a good time to do shopping. It's rushed, fast paced. Fast fast, we go to the bank, and stand in line. We used just to go to TD, and there used to be a whole long line. (Joe)

Banking posed a particular problem. One participant, Chris, noted that when he first came workers would ask the farmer to allow them to leave early on Fridays to make it to the bank so as to cash their paychecks and make remittances to their families back home:

but that wasn't good enough for the boss cause he wanted us to work till 5. He introduced us to Royal Bank, where you get the debit card now. So he can haul you ass there till 6 o'clock if he want. You don't have to get in the line. You just get the debit machine. (Chris)

The absence of shops within walking or biking distance, or of public transit or other transportation options to the nearest town meant that workers incurred unexpected costs to meet their basic needs. Because of time constraints one participant talked about how he resorted to using a taxi which would cost up to \$25 each way.

Sometimes I've got to go to go town on a Friday, cash my check, then Saturday, leave an hour early, I get a cab and go into town to get my groceries. (Bob)

Thus, while the long hours, tiring work and overall heavy workload certainly impacted participants capacity to have the sort of social lives that would permit them to develop informal social ties with Canadians, their overcrowded housing conditions also caused them to lose valuable free time, as did the isolated location of their housing and restricted access to transportation. The living conditions in bunkhouses provided by farmers constituted a serious barrier to the enjoyment of the worker's minimal free time. More precisely, participants' non-work time, mobility and interactions were governed, more or less in their entirety, by the heavily restricted nature of their conditions of employment and relationship with their employer.

Consequently, whether they intended to or not, farmers exerted almost as much control over workers' free time as they did over their work time, albeit in less explicit ways.

‘We was in the bunk house a lot’: from spatial isolation to restricted social participation

For those we interviewed, the development of informal social network ties had characteristics specific to the conditions of their working lives and housing conditions. Workers in the general population with full labour market access are relatively free to develop external ties beyond their working relation. Enjoying the full legal rights that come with broader access to the labour market, such workers are permitted to separate their working and home lives if they so wish. Thus, the informal ties that workers with broader rights can and do develop may be said to be unregulated and diffuse. Migrant agricultural workers do not have the same opportunities to develop such ties. For them, relationships in both their work and home environments are heavily circumscribed: they have no control over who they interact with in work situations or with whom they live in the close quarters of the bunkhouse, nor do they have control over transit between job sites or from a job site to accommodations. Even more significantly, their working and housing conditions are so heavily intertwined that they mitigate against the development of informal ties with the wider non-migrant worker community. Thus, migrant agricultural workers have very little opportunity for the development of the kinds of spontaneous or voluntary social relations that are taken for granted by the general population.

When asked about opportunities for socializing outside of work hours, all participants were quick to point out that given the exhausting nature of their work the vast majority of their free time (beyond basic provisioning) was spent in or around the bunkhouse:

We're tired when we're working. When work is done we tired, we stay home, get some rest. (Peter)

You're tired, need to get some rest. Say if we're not working today. We stay at home, play domino, cook, we eat and get some rest because tomorrow is another work day. (Michael)

So any down time was spent on the farm or in the bunk house? (interviewer)

Yeah, was spent there, we was in the bunk house a lot. (Michael)

As outlined earlier, conditions in the bunkhouse were by no means ideal. Nonetheless the bunkhouse was the primary physical setting in which to spend most of the leisure time that workers had.

On occasion, participants did go off-farm, not only to shop as discussed above, but also to socialize.

We go to the bar, a couple guys and we go down for a beer, one beer, sometime two [laughs] and just get a cab back home, see, we always gotta work the next day (Joe)

You workin' so much, so it's kind of hard to go out, to go people's houses, to really sit down and have a good time (Lee)

Because of their restricted access to transportation, and their relative physical and social isolation, participants noted that the minimal off-farm leisure time that they had was spent for the most part with fellow migrant workers.

When you went out to socialize would you meet other people, people who you didn't work with? (interviewer)

No, not people I didn't work with.... mostly with the same people [from the bunkhouse] all the time we go out (Michael)

Further probing on opportunities for off-farm leisure revealed that on occasion participants would be invited to parties elsewhere, but these were the exception rather than the rule:

Every once and awhile someone would say come over. Not too much, cause it's all about work. You got to get that. Sometimes you get one day off and you can't just go hang out somewhere, you need to rest (Chris)

Yeah, we get invited sometimes, but we never really go cause the times that people would invite us out is times where we have to work (late?), cause we have a schedule so it can't happen..... If you go you can't stay too long. You just go for an hour or two, cause next day you gotta get back up. 5.30, 6 the next morning there's 6-7 guys in one trailer looking to use the stove, the washroom, getting

lunch together, so is hard to go to people's houses to sit down y'know, to sit and *really* have a good time (Joe)

Instead, workers sometimes had parties at the bunkhouse:

Well, I used to throw my own parties, at the farm (laughs). I would talk to the guys, I would tell the boss, if we gonna have Saturday or Sunday off, he'd say ok, we going to have a little party. Invite some people. He [the boss] used to call me the party man (laughs). We would invite Canadians that we meet. We'd say to the guys let's have a party, want to throw some money? And we'd buy some liquor, and get some food (Joe)

Beyond these occasional parties, the vast majority of leisure time was spent at the bunkhouse, preparing for the next day's work:

Stay in bunkhouse, listen to music, cook food. If outside nice, sit down on the lawn, drink a couple beers (Lee)

While there is clearly a relationship between workers' spatial and social isolation, it would be an oversimplification to reduce their social isolation to the physical location of their work sites and homes. Having very little opportunity for voluntary movement, even when participants ventured from the socially insulated environment of the bunkhouse to local towns, they remained in some ways separate from the broader community. Thus, off-farm interactions available to migrant agricultural workers became concentrated in a narrow range of times and places: Friday evenings at the bank and in the local supermarket, and one of a handful of local bars on an occasional Saturday night. More or less all other interactions are intra-group with fellow farm workers or with their employer, and the majority of these too are on the work site.

That said, participants did point to some important opportunities for interactions with the local community. For example, two participants had attended local church services in their time as migrant workers, and while two others had expressed interest in doing so they were unable to due primarily to work hours and lack of transportation.

We was planning to go to church because the boss tell us that we're not going to work. So we got the church clothes pressed.... after we get ready the boss come

and say that, we mustn't go anywhere. And we say, oh hell... him come and say that there's some problem and he needs help, so we no go to church that Sunday. (Michael)

Would you go other Sundays? (interviewer)

No, because I didn't have my licence that year to drive. And the guy who would drive, him didn't want to go to church, so that's what set you back (Michael)

Yeah, so we don't get to go to church. We don't have any friends who go to church who we could say 'alright I want to go to church this Sunday so you come and get me, we go to church.' I don't have that friend (Chris)

One participant had attended church more regularly, and this was primarily due to the fact that the farm on which he worked was located close to a church so he did not need to depend on the farmer-designated driver for transportation.

The church was just up the street. Just walk down the street....some of the boys will go. It was nice. Even before I came some of the guys used to perform at the church. They had, can't remember what they call it.... like a concertwhere they cook Bajan food, and, show Canadians, give them a taste of the culture from Barbados..... the other guys did that. The guys that were here before me (Joe)

This event, a small banquet held in a local church, clearly enhanced contact with rural Nova Scotians. One of our six participants, Peter, had taken part in this gathering, while all of the others had heard positive things about it.

We have a little banquet at the church and we sing some Bob Marley tunes, a lot of food and things, introducing the people to West Indian food... we made lots of food, some cou-cou [Barbadian dish] and a guy bring flyin' fish.....Cause when we first here people not sure about us, but then after they get to know us, they really been ok. At the banquet they get to know us a little bit. ...we only did it one year, two times I think. (Peter)

That all interview participants knew of this event, despite only one having take part in it, indicates a desire on the part of migrant workers to have opportunities for positive interaction with local residents of the communities in which they work.

Given the general absence of diverse contexts or fora where migrant workers might spontaneously develop informal ties with rural Nova Scotians, then we are left to ask not where, but how and with whom do such informal ties develop. All participants agreed that the single

most important contacts that they made in their time as migrant workers (besides their employers and their future Canadian spouses) were former migrant workers who had settled in the area. Whether or not they were fellow countrymen, former workers who had settled in Nova Scotia gave current workers some small sense of community in Canada.

Former workers would come to the farm early in the season to say hello, and to see if there were any people they recognized from back home. Subsequently, they would pick up shopping and supplies on weekdays when work hours were longest.

And the guys that live here, used to come and visit. That was a good treat from the guys. They would come and visit you and they'd see that you were out of bread, pop, whatever. They run into the store (Peter)

The continuity offered by settled workers became increasingly important from year to year as some migrant workers returned and others did not, so that often a participant could be working with an entirely different crew from season to season. Former workers who had settled in Canada provided informal support and acted as intermediaries in developing friendships with other people in the community:

So I make some other friends, and I meet [a former worker who settled]. [He] been here long time and knows lots of people, so through [him] I know some more guys again, guys who livin' here now. So that's how I make friends. (Michael)

My friend who I worked with, he got married a year before me. So, then that way I start to meet Canadians. Like if we get a little break on weekends, we will go to the bar, meet people and have a little bit of a good time. (Joe)

All of the above is not to say that workers' isolation is absolute. The very fact that these workers have taken the only available pathway to residency through sponsorship by a Canadian citizen or permanent resident demonstrates that social contacts do occur, and occasionally they develop into intimate relationships. Several of our interview participants were introduced to their present day Canadian spouses through the spouses of former workers who had settled in rural Nova Scotia. So, while our interview data makes it clear that workers' social contacts in the

wider Nova Scotian community were quite restricted, in four cases it is former workers or their spouses that provided the initial mediating contacts through which other workers came to settle in rural Nova Scotia by marrying Canadian citizens. Given the large numbers of workers who come to Nova Scotia each season and the considerably smaller number who eventually gain permanent residency through marriage, these cases are somewhat exceptional.

For the former seasonal agricultural workers who we interviewed, it was by way of beginning to make plans to settle in Canada that opportunities for wider social participation came about through participants or fellow workers marrying Canadians:

The only other thing is weddings, we have a good party after that, we meet lots of people then (Chris)

Most significantly, it is through workers' Canadian spouses that informal ties and bonds of friendship between migrant workers and rural Nova Scotians tended to happen:

So, I don't make friends until I meet my wife, then we get married, and through she... I meet people. (Michael)

I meet a lot of people, when I get married. People that I didn't know, a lot of people (Joe)

Thus, wider integration into the community tended to only begin in earnest once the workers were on the path to permanent residency that comes with marriage. This is clearly a positive for those who develop intimate relations with a Canadian, but it also serves to demonstrate the relative underdevelopment of the ordinary informal social ties that are key to feeling oneself to be part of a community.

Conclusion

In this study we have sought to unpack the experiences of participants in the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program who have settled in rural Nova Scotia. Through our interviews we discovered that temporary foreign workers who are doubly precarious in terms of their

employment and their immigration status, are also very much marginal to the communities in which they live and work while in Canada. Further, the opportunities available to migrant workers for developing informal ties in rural Nova Scotia are restricted by their living conditions, their hours of work, the location of their housing, and poor access to transport. That this replicates the findings of those who have conducted similar studies in Ontario is not surprising.

The expansion of this form of managed migration (Reed 2008) is generally designed to make permanent residency more, not less, difficult. The settlement of migrant workers is clearly not in line with the current direction of immigration policy in Canada, which seeks to sustain precarity by actively working against temporary workers achieving permanent residency. Nonetheless, the continuing expansion of various forms of temporary worker status will likely also lead to higher numbers of migrant workers seeking to settle in Canada, even with the sorts of barriers discussed in this study. The experiences of migrant workers in general and the narrow pathway to settlement availed of by participants in this study clearly demonstrate the need for expanded opportunities for informal contact with the wider community. Furthermore, immigrant retention in rural areas, particularly in Atlantic Canada, is a significant problem (Ramos and Yoshida 2011). The necessity of examining and expanding the possibilities for migrant workers to develop ties in and to the communities where they work is one clear way to address this problem, particularly if those workers express interest in settling in Atlantic Canada's rural communities. An important step in this direction is to create and foster off-farm interactions and opportunities for both training/education and leisure, as these will likely also lead to smoother settlement experiences in the medium-term and greater integration of former migrant workers in the longer-term. As it stands marriage to Canadian citizens and permanent residents is the sole mechanism through which migrant labourers can settle in Canada.

Sociologists have demonstrated that individuals with a diverse range of social ties, even weak ones (Granovetter 1972), tend to find social support through these ties, and further, that weak ties tend to advance a wider range of labour market opportunities in the future. While immigrant populations more broadly often have difficulties developing the weak ties that permit and promote career opportunities, for former migrant workers who settle in rural Nova Scotia, such ties are largely underdeveloped. Without the expansion of broader opportunities for creating a diversity of informal ties in local communities, migrant workers who settle will likely continue both to lack a wide range of labour market opportunities and to have uneven settlement experiences. Given our findings, this is clearly connected to their initial work and living situation as migrant workers.

Two decades ago, in a qualitative study of seasonal agricultural workers in Canada, social geographers Cecil and Ebanks examined the everyday lives of migrant workers in southern Ontario. They noted that the

spatial distribution of West Indian farm workers creates a human geography of *de facto* separation. In essence, black men are scattered in isolated pockets on white owned farms. The surrounding communities, belonging to the greater Canadian realm, which purports to be multicultural, make no special effort, and establish no special services to welcome these guests that appear annually in their midst (1991: 389).

Twenty years the situation in Nova Scotia looks eerily similar. We still lack comprehensive understanding of the everyday lives and experiences of migrant workers in Nova Scotia. There is an obvious need to develop more research on seasonal agricultural workers in rural Nova Scotia. The dearth of existing research may well be connected to the relative isolation (both spatial and social) of migrant workers, but this absence also provides for research opportunities. Future research could be directed towards comparing the experiences of workers under older regulations and newer ones (like the Low Skill Pilot Project), in particular to assess

if changes in program requirements have expanded the vulnerabilities of migrant workers. Similarly, research is needed to understand the impact of the new wage structure for TFWP announced in May 2012.

Two other significant research possibilities emerge out of our work. First, given that all of our participants spoke of the positive informal role played by former workers who had settled in Canada, then more research is needed to flesh out the role of former workers in providing both formal and informal support to present migrant workers. Secondly, and more ambitiously, a longitudinal research project employing multi-sited ethnography involving multiple returnees would help to more fully understand the lives of migrant workers both in Canada and in their 'home' countries, and would also give insights into the global effects of national immigration policies (Marcus 1995). This kind of longitudinal research could also examine in greater detail the barriers and pathways to permanent residency that some migrant workers experience, as well as their settlement experiences. One clear shortcoming of our work is that it focused only on English speaking migrant workers. The increased presence of Mexican migrant workers merits scrutiny, especially since their social isolation is likely to be even more pronounced given language barriers.

While the above recommendations for future research are aimed at specific issues, we would also like to make some suggestions around methodological tools that may be of value to future researchers. One way of addressing the problem of researching migrant workers, may be to employ respondent driven sampling, a newer sampling methodology that has been successful elsewhere in researching vulnerable and/or hard to reach populations (Bjørkhaug and Hatløy 2009; Sadler et al. 2010) Such a methodology would allow researchers to more fully understand networks, involvements, interactions and the relative strength of social ties from the perspectives of various stakeholders (migrant workers, employers, spouses, local businesses, rural Nova

Scotians more generally). This would require substantial funding and a highly-trained research team, but could yield, among other things, a much greater understanding of migrant workers' social networks and the kinds of contacts that line pathways to permanent residency.

In terms of policy recommendations, our research findings lead us to mirror many of the recommendations made by previous researchers who have examined the lives of migrant workers in rural Canada.

- i. At the most basic level, migrant workers must be afforded greater labour market mobility; even the freedom to move between farms would be a step in the right direction as it would give workers greater autonomy over their working relation.
- ii. Make clear and accessible information on rights and entitlements in native languages available to all migrant workers to counter the haphazard patchwork of rumour and misinformation that has the potential to lead to serious problems should workers encounter legal, employment or medical problems.
- iii. Ensure that migrant workers' housing meets municipal and provincial housing laws through inspections and enforcement.
- iv. Open up pathways for settlement through training and education opportunities for migrant workers who return year after year.
- v. Introduce a system of credits for time spent working in Canada similar to those available to international students and live-in caregivers. This would create pathways to permanent residency for migrant workers who spend multiple seasons living and working in Canada

Further, there is a need to enhance the opportunities for workers to develop community ties in rural Nova Scotia by increasing their possibilities for interacting with the broader

community. This means assisting in the generation of relationships that are not mediated by the employer. To this end we make the following additional recommendations:

- vi. Create a small funding pool for workers to organize social events. While government funding is unlikely to be forthcoming to facilitate union organizing by migrant labour, seed money could be directed towards social events, short festivals and resource sharing activities. Events as simple as church dinners assist in breaking down the kinds of intangible social barriers that workers experience.
- vii. Promote the development of small town festivals to celebrate the contributions of seasonal workers to the local community and the local economy. These would provide opportunities for positive social engagement and interaction between migrant workers and the communities where they live.
- viii. Formalize a consultative role for multiple returnees in helping new workers to find their feet. While this already happens informally, it is likely that many migrant workers do not make such links.
- ix. Facilitate contact between former workers who have settled and incoming migrant workers through the creation of local immigrant associations. The development of opportunities for contact between migrant workers and locals is likely best facilitated by former workers who have settled, though they too lack existing institutional capacity. For example, there is no formal organization of former migrant workers or Caribbean immigrants in Nova Scotia. Modest financial and administrative support for the creation of such organizations could work towards easing the transition of workers who stay.

Several of our recommendations are aimed at expanding possibilities for the development of relationship bridges between migrant workers and rural Nova Scotian communities. These would be of clear benefit to migrant workers in feeling some sense of belonging and would enhance local level acceptance of their presence. A possible intangible benefit of this to the community is the creation of social environments that have a greater capacity to engage and integrate other immigrants, thus addressing some elements of the problems with immigrant retention in Atlantic Canada (Ramos and Yoshida 2011).

It is clear that the status quo treats the migrant worker labour pool as cheap and replaceable annually *ad infinitum*. The existing state of affairs basically replicates in contemporary form the older kinds of social and spatial segregation which are more properly consigned to the dust heap of history. Any self-congratulatory orientation towards contemporary immigration in Canada demands closer scrutiny, especially given the rapid expansion of various classes of temporary foreign worker over the last decade. As many farmers in Nova Scotia and elsewhere in Canada seek to reorient local economies through the growth of both local markets and organic agriculture, increased labour costs are likely to be met by expanding the cheapest sources of labour available. The reliance on migrant labour for the transformation of local economies in Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada more broadly is underexplored and will undoubtedly prove to be a significant issue as wider desire for and acceptance of local agriculture as a good in itself develops. We expect that future research and local initiatives will be directed towards improving working and living conditions for migrant workers while in Canada, enhancing their prospects for achieving permanent residency should they so wish, and in developing the opportunities for the kinds of positive cross-cultural interaction that lead to vibrant, welcoming and prosperous rural communities.

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ⁱ A brief note on terms: seasonal agriculture worker is the term used in the government literature. This report will use this term and migrant worker interchangeably. Similarly, temporary foreign worker and migrant worker will be used throughout.

ⁱⁱ The Low Skill Pilot Project began in 2002, but only started to include agricultural workers more recently. While the interviewees for this research all entered through SAWP, it is worth noting that the programs are alike in many ways. The operation of two very similar programs that offer almost, but not exactly, the same terms of temporary employment in agriculture, raises more, not less, questions around the status of migrant workers in Canada. For example, while the SAWP is restricted to the specific countries listed below, the LSPP is not; the SAWP offers seasonal permits where workers must exit the country in the same calendar year in which they arrived, while LSPP permits are not seasonal but valid up to 24 months, renewable to a maximum of 4 years (thus also limiting pathways to permanent residency).

ⁱⁱⁱ The Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) in Nova Scotia does not currently have a program that supports lower-skilled workers; however, Manitoba, for example, deemed roughly 500 workers at the Maple Leaf Foods plant in Brandon, eligible for the PNP. And, to note, domestic workers under the Live-in Caregiver Program (LICP), are eligible to apply for residency after working for a minimum of 24 months, or, 3,900 hours in four years.

^{iv} Importantly, even those who initially came because of a friend or family member who had some experience of the SAWP did not necessarily end up working side-by-side with anyone that they knew from their home countries. Two participants made special efforts to be assigned to the same farms as friends and family members. For example, for one participant it took three seasons to work towards getting a job on the same farm as a friend from the Caribbean, while for another it took two seasons to end up on the same farm as his brother. Both of these participants spent two or three seasons as agricultural workers on farms in southern Ontario before being united with their friend/family member in Nova Scotia, though only for the duration of the contracts. This reunification was only possible through coordination and negotiation with employers in Nova Scotia, and participants gave us the sense that these sorts of arrangements were the exception rather than the rule.