

TEMPORARY MIGRANT FARMWORKERS IN CANADA

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INTRODUCTION

March 16 ban on non-essential foreign travel

Panic among growers

Lobbying to permit temporary migrant workers to enter

March 21 – farmworkers are exempted from the ban



“essential workers”



“an issue of food security.”



“This measure will ensure Canadians will have continued access to healthy and affordable Canadian food when they go to the grocery store.”

**MARIE-CLAUDE BIBEAU, MINISTER OF
AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD**

EMPLOYMENT OF
MIGRANT WORKERS
IN CANADA

60,000 in Canada

14,000 in Ontario

16,000 in Quebec

Pre-screening

14-day quarantine

\$50 million funding to cover wages or costs of sheltering while in quarantine

\$1,500 per worker

COVID-19 GUIDELINES



QUESTIONS

- How have migrant farmworkers come to be “indispensable”?
- “Indispensable”? Or cheap, compliant and “disposable”?
- Has COVID-19 made them even more “disposable”?
- Should their “temporariness” be rethought?

IN SEARCH OF “RELIABLE
WORKERS”

- 1960s: shortage of “experienced” and “reliable” workers
- 1960s - lobbying to bring off-shore workers
- 1966: SAWP
- 2002: Agricultural Stream, Temporary Foreign Workers Program
- Inadmissible as permanent residents



INDISPENSABLE?

Lack of legal protections
(e.g., right to collective
bargaining)

Low Wages, Exposure
to Occupational
Hazards and Risks

Disposable (deportable;
pressure at work, long
hours, substandard
housing)

COVID 19 OUTBREAKS

- Bylands Nursery, Kelowna, BC
- Highline Mushroom farm, Kingsville, Ontario
- Greenhill Farms, Chatham, Ontario (95 confirmed cases)
- Cargill, Alberta (over 1,500 cases)
- More?



Overcrowding

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graph TD; A[Overcrowding] --> B[Sharing rooms]; B --> C[Sharing kitchens]; C --> D[Sharing bathroom];
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Sharing rooms

Sharing kitchens

Sharing bathroom

HOUSING AND COVID-19

PERMANENTLY TEMPORARY

- “temporary over many years”
- Greenhouses, 12-month operation
- Right to permanent residency





AGRI-FOOD
IMMIGRATION
PILOT

- Launched May 15, 2020
- address the labour needs of Canadian employers in the meat processing, mushroom and greenhouse production, and livestock-raising industries
- 2,750 principal applicants + family members
- Until May 14, 2023

RETHINKING IMMIGRATION PRIORITIES

- Should “low-skilled” labour remain temporary?
- Extended rights to permanent residency?
- Improvement of protections?
- Improvement in working conditions?

time
FOR
CHANGE