

From the Voices of Mexican Seasonal Farm Workers in Alberta

by

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Abstract

In response to labour shortages across various sectors, including agriculture, the Government of Canada created the Temporary Labour Program, one stream of which is the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP). Mexico is currently the major partnering country, which runs the matching *Programa de Trabajadores Agrícolas Temporales* (PTAT) which accounts for 43.8% of all migrant seasonal farm labourers in Canada (SRE, 2022). With the increasing number of migrant workers in Canada, there are growing concerns about their labour and living conditions. Loo (2014) and other authors contend that to improve international labour programs so as to better serve foreign workers, it is critical to learn migrant workers' perspectives by having their voices heard. There are, however, challenges to speaking with foreign farm workers, including language differences, rural locations, long workdays, living constraints, and fear of speaking out.

Most research on migrant workers has been conducted in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia, which have the highest provincial numbers. Conversely, there has been little research examining migrant workers' experiences in the province of Alberta. My qualitative, participatory research contributes to the literature by exploring the perspectives of Mexican seasonal agriculture workers who have participated in the PTAT in Alberta. I used a focused ethnographic approach and methods of PhotoVoice and semi-structured interviews to learn about their motivations for enrolling in the PTAT and their experiences of working in the agriculture sector in this provincial context. Participants' narratives and photographic images provided information about: their motives for enrolling in the PTAT; how they navigated the application process; their lived experiences while working on farms and other agriculture businesses in Alberta; the impacts on their health and well-being; and, their perspectives on their role in Canada's agri-food

system. I also explored workers' perspectives on being part of this international labour program during the COVID-19 pandemic and how this influenced the different stages of their experiences, both in Mexico and Canada. As part of the investigation of participants' perspectives on health and well-being, I asked them about their access to health services and healthy and culturally appropriate food, and opportunities they had to experience community life in Alberta.

Many of the findings from this research align with previous studies illuminating the vulnerable and challenging working and living conditions of migrant agricultural workers in Canada. Novel insights gained through this participatory research with Mexican migrant agriculture workers in Alberta focus on the application process and institutional context in Mexico, workers' perspectives on their health and well-being, and their narratives and photographic images about their lived experiences in Alberta during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Maricruz Barba González. The research project received ethics approval from the University of Alberta Ethics Board 1, No: Pro00118139. April 1, 2022.

Dedication

This research is dedicated to all those hands that sustain a fundamental pillar of human existence; growing food. May their work and voices be heard and help to create a fairer world for everyone.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I want to thank the Mexican workers who made this research possible. Your participation is not a minor thing since it required courage to break the silence in an environment traditionally restrictive; to all, I want to express my deep gratitude and how much I feel honored, through this work, to be a bridge to communicate your perspectives. In the near future, I hope that it is you who will communicate freely and direct your thoughts and ideas.

I also want to thank my supervisor, Dr. Mary Beckie, for her continuous support, patience, and dedication. Her insights, both academically and personally, nourished this investigation. In the same vein, thank you to all the members of my committee, Jason Foster, and my external reader, Bukola Salami, whose valuable observations helped to improve my work. Their valuable research provides insights into the labour and health conditions of foreign workers in Canada.

I extend my gratitude to members of the Mexican Consulate in Calgary, who opened a space for me to do my practicum with them, and for being willing to discuss and reflect on the program. Thank you very much.

I want to thank my Mom for always encouraging me to follow my interests even though sometimes they are challenging. My greatest thanks to my life partner, Alberto, who gave me strength and helped navigate the process of the whole master's program with humor and joy, also for learning about my research subject, and discussing it with me. Many times, we fixed and unfixed the world with our solutions, alternatives, ideas, theories, and so much more. Thank you for being such a great partner and for being interested in my passions.

Thanks to my friends in Mexico and my previous teachers and employers who also came on board with my research topic, sharing their thoughts and ideas.

And last but not least, I want to thank my MACE peers and friends who listened to me, cheered me up, and laughed with me when things seemed complicated; everything helped me to fulfill this goal.

I definitely consider this work as a collective effort. To all, thank you very much.

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Glossary

Farmas

Mexican workers refer to the farms as “farmas”; it’s a combination between farm and granja. “Granja” in Spanish means farm.

Patrón

It refers to the employer. The one who offers a job and who “owns”.

Traila

Mexican workers refer to the trailer where they live.

Prologue

This investigation is the result of a non-linear process with the main objective of engaging with and learning about the experiences of seasonal Mexican workers in the Province of Alberta. In the beginning, I thought this research would be relatively easy to execute as I am a Mexican who speaks Spanish as my native language, and I have had experience conducting interviews and field work in several settings. But as I was reading and learning about Canada's temporary labour programs, and about the experiences of some workers within these programs, I came to realize the complexity of the topic and the difficulty of the task I had set for myself. It wasn't just about being able to speak the same language, or having interviewing experience; I realized that the restrictive system within which these individuals work not only limits their interactions with people outside their work place, but also creates a level of fear and intimidation about voicing their opinions. In an effort to overcome this, I arranged an internship with the Mexican Consulate based in Calgary, as they run the PTAT, thinking this would enable me to have direct contact with Mexican seasonal agriculture workers. This position did help me to engage with many seasonal workers, but it didn't solve the initial distrust workers tended to have with people affiliated with the Consulate. I am not joking when I say that from approximately a hundred workers I had the chance to meet through the Consulate, only five agreed to participate in the research. The remainder of those interviewed I met either during a chance encounter at a supermarket, through a Facebook posting, or through workers' referrals to others they knew in the PTAT.

There was also the challenge of workers not having the opportunity to freely go off farm or receive guests, so most of our interactions were done via cellphone. Another challenge was their long working days; most interviews had to be conducted really early in the morning before

work started, or very late at night after the day's work was done. Developing a list of relevant guiding questions for the interviews was also daunting. The many conversations I had with the members of my supervisory committee, my previous colleagues, teachers and friends with experience in migration topics, generated a wide spectrum of reflections and potential questions. Moreover, the existing literature on the topic was quite broad so it was difficult to narrow my questions down to a reasonable number, especially since the intention was for workers to also introduce other topics they considered relevant. This "complication" was solved thanks to the participants of this research for reinforcing key themes, which underlined for me what other authors had stated about the need to have workers' voices heard. Having said that, overall, I consider this research to be a collaboration of many people.

This thesis begins with a brief explanation of the context in which international labour programs were created, the impacts for Canada and Mexico in terms of the labour reconfiguration in agriculture, and what authors have discovered about workers' labour conditions. In Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, Mexican seasonal agriculture workers who are currently participating or have participated in the PTAT share their perspectives on the enrolment process and work experience, along with the impacts on their health and wellness. They share their stories: what motivated them to enroll in the program; what they appreciate about it; the difficulties and their strategies to cope; how they access health services; how they experience Canadian culture; and other related topics.

Personally, I feel humbled and grateful for participants' trust. I admire and appreciate their contributions to our food system. But this research has reinforced my concerns about the future of agriculture in Canada, Mexico and around the world. I hope that this thesis adds to the

efforts to create a fairer world for everyone particularly for the agricultural workers around the globe.

Chapter One: Introduction

Economic globalization has enabled cross-border trade and investment impacting multiple sectors. One consequence has been the reconfiguration of traditional place-based food production, distribution and marketing systems towards a globalized, industrialized agri-food system characterized by transnational mobility of products, technology, labour and capital (Blessing et al., 2017; Qualman et al., 2018; Senauer & Venturini, 2005; Shetty, 2003 as cited in Kennedy et al., 2004). Food producers, manufacturers, and retailers have had to adjust to the changing and competitive environment, and to satisfying global market demands (Senauer & Venturini, 2005). However, it is worth noting that the effects of globalization of the food system have been experienced differently in each country (Kahler, 2004).

In Canada, from the early 1990s onwards, the government actively promoted policies to maximize agri-food exports through improving productivity (Qualman et al., 2018). As a consequence, agriculture in Canada has become increasingly dependent on external inputs, from agrochemicals and antibiotics to high-tech equipment and machinery. It also resulted in an expansion of farm size so as to benefit from an economies of scale approach. As farm size has increased, however, the number of farmers and farms has steadily declined across the country, as has the availability of farm labour. In 1966, labour shortages in Canadian agriculture led to the design and implementation of the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) (Employment and Social Development Canada [ESDC], 2022a; Verma, 2003). SAWP is a stream of Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) Program and it first started as a partnership with Jamaica (1966) and later included Mexico (1974) (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores [SRE], n.d.) and several other Caribbean countries (ESDC, 2022b,c). In Mexico the matching program is known as *Programa de Trabajadores Agrícolas Temporales* (PTAT).

Over the past three decades, there has been a rising dependency on foreign farm labour (Molnar, 2018; Weiler & McLaughlin, 2019). In 2004, Canada reported 19,880 seasonal farm workers. That number increased by 142% in 2017 to 48,095 workers and in 2021 Canada welcomed 61,735 temporary workers in the agricultural sector (Rural Migration News, 2019). The leading partner country is Mexico, which accounts for 43.8% of the farm workers in temporary agricultural programs in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2022). Prior to the partnership with Canada, Mexico had the experiences of sending farm workers to the United States as early as 1942 through the program known as *Bracero* (Binford, 2013).

Along with the growing reliance on foreign migrant workers, there have been increasing concerns about their living and working conditions, and their overall well-being. Investigations by academics, activists and the media have explored the precariousness of foreign temporary laborers¹ in Canada, including their health and safety, housing, cultural integration, wages and hours worked (Spitzer, 2022, Beaumont, 2021; Foster, 2013; Otero and Preibisch, 2014; Salami et al., 2015; Weiler and McLaughlin, 2019; Worswick, 2010). According to Loo (2014), understanding workers' experiences can contribute to policy reforms that better serve the workers. Weiler and McLaughlin (2019) concur that it is crucial “to keep migrant workers’ preferences and demands at the forefront of our policy recommendations” (p. 382). However, research exploring the lived experiences of seasonal farm workers through their own voices faces several barriers such as: language differences; remote locations; workers’ fear of reprisals; and, lack of time or proper space for dialogue (Le et al., 2021; Preibish, 2010).

¹ This includes workers from the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program.

To date, most of the research examining foreign farm workers' perspectives has been carried out in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia (Beaumont, 2021; Encalada, 2019; Weiler et al., 2015;2017), which have the highest numbers. My research focuses on Mexican migrant farm workers in the province of Alberta, which has received less attention, despite increasing dependence on foreign agriculture labourers (Nash, 2021). For example, in 2018 there were 1,900 seasonal farm workers in Alberta (Green, 2020; Statistics Canada, 2020); by 2029 it is estimated that number will climb to 19,600 (Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council, n.d.). Working in agriculture in Canada's Prairie Region, where rural communities are sparsely populated and farming operations are large-scale, is distinct from other regions of the country. Hence, this research aims to contribute novel insights into the lived experiences of Mexican farm workers in this context.

1.1 Research Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of my research was to understand and illuminate the lived experiences of Mexican seasonal farm workers in the province of Alberta, particularly as relates to factors impacting their health and well being, such as access to health services, culturally appropriate food and cultural integration. By opening spaces for dialogue, this research intended to enable migrant Mexican farmworkers to tell their stories of being part of the complex labour dimension of a globalized food system.

More specifically, the objectives of this research were:

1. To identify the life circumstances that motivated the Mexican migrant workers to participate in the PTAT in Alberta;
2. To learn about their process of applying for and being selected to be part of PTAT
3. To identify the benefits of their participation in the program;

4. To identify the challenges they encounter during their employment and stay in Canada and what mechanisms they have to cope with those challenges;
5. To learn about their access to health services and nutritious and culturally appropriate food;
6. To learn about the extent to which they are able to experience Canadian culture and integrate into local communities, as well as other aspects they consider important to their well-being.

This work aims to contribute to scholarly literature examining farm workers' experiences. I also hope that my research will help efforts to reformulate seasonal labour programs in agriculture, thus improving the overall experience of foreign farm workers in Canada. I anticipate the outcomes of this research will be of interest to academics, activists and policymakers working in the areas of labour migration, labour conditions, labour rights, migration, and food justice.

1.2 Guiding Theoretical Framework

My research was informed by a food justice theoretical framework. Research addressing the conditions of farm workers in Canada shares several objectives of food justice. Therefore, I believe a food justice theoretical lens is an appropriate frame to examine and reflect on the conditions that the Mexican seasonal agricultural workers experience in Alberta, as well as providing a platform for a discussion of alternatives.

1.2.1 Defining Food Justice

Food justice has emerged as a social movement and a social theory that questions and analyzes injustice and disparities in food systems, and seeks to address this through initiatives that provide more equitable access to land, credit, markets, as well as better working conditions and salaries for all workers in the agricultural sector (Earth Observing System [EOS], 2020). As

a theory and as a movement, food justice exposes the structural roots that are the origins of injustice in the food system (FoodPrint, n.d.).

One of the most important elements of food justice is the quest for structural and distributive transformation in the globalized food system that currently negatively impacts exploited, oppressed, and unattended communities (e.g. immigrants, women, the LGBTQ community) (Food Secure Canada [FSC], n.d.). Most notably, this transformation aims to include changes in the laws, regulations, institutions, and cultural beliefs that shield corporate and immutable privileges (Nyéléni, 2015). In addition to this, food justice aligns with the United Nations' sustainable development goals in which the alleviation of hunger and economic and social welfare is guaranteed to *all* those involved in the food chain (FAO, 2021). The role of immigrant farm workers aligns with one of the pillars of social sustainability in food systems (Ross, 2018) that calls for fair and equitable conditions for agricultural workers (EOS, 2020). Moreover, food justice aims to ensure that farm workers and immigrant farmers are at the center of the discussion about how food should be produced and how these practices need to shift (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010). For the purpose of my research, I focused on the pillar of food justice that highlights the struggle of most farm workers in the world - to attain a dignified and secure life - within the context of a system that prioritizes economic gain over peoples' well-being.

In my research, I adopted the definition provided by Gottlieb and Joshi, (2010) that states that food justice is a concept that refers to “equity and fairness in relation to food system impacts and a different, more just, and sustainable way for food to be grown, produced, made accessible, and eaten” (p. 223). I explore what Hochedez (2021) identifies as a gap in the food justice framework that allows the employment injustices in the globalized agri-food system that arise as a consequence of capitalism.

The term food justice is relatively recent and, to date, it represents a concept under construction; however, its origins can be traced to the environmental justice movement (FoodPrint, n.d.). Many elements of environmental justice relate to the inequities in the food system, especially in terms of structural organization, power relations, and distribution processes. According to Alkon and Cadji (2018), the term acquired increasing attention and independence since the mid-2000 when several anti-racist movements raised awareness about injustices and inequalities within the food chain (Hislop cited in Alkon & Cadji, 2018). While the concept has primarily been used in activism, it is being utilized in academic literature that describes ways in which exploitation and oppression persist within the food system (Braun, 2021; Glennie & Alkon, 2018).

Gobbliet et al. (2010) adopt food justice as a term of multiple interpretations which encompass the injustice of the globalized food system as well as the root causes. It also opens spaces to present new models that aim to create fairness and equity for all the people involved in the food chain while respecting nature and balance with the environment. For Gobbliet et al. (2010), the definition of food justice encompasses aspects of “where, what, and how food is grown, produced, transported, accessed, and eaten” (p.5). Because of its complexity, it is possible to use this term from an array of approaches. However, according to Gobbliet et al. there are three main dimensions from which food justice can be approached:

- (i) seeking to challenge and restructure the dominant food system; (ii) providing a core focus on equity and disparities and the struggles by those who are most vulnerable; and, (iii) establishing linkages and common goals with other forms of social justice activism and advocacy—whether immigrant rights, worker justice, transportation and access, or land use. (Gobbliet et al., 2010, p. ix)

Food justice also presents a way to link all the elements involved within the food system. Fundamentally, it places immigrant farmers, farmworkers, local and rural farmers and residents, as well as workers in food processing and distribution enterprises at the core of discussions about how food is currently grown, produced and distributed, and it also analyzes how and which practices need to be transformed (Gobbliet et al., 2010).

1.3 Literature Review

In the following literature review I begin by briefly describing: 1) what characterizes a food system and how globalization has shaped it, focusing on the context of Canada, Alberta and Mexico; 2) labour precarity as one of the results of globalization in the food system and legalized through temporary work programs; and, 3) the creation of SAWP and PTAT. Following that, I will delve into how food justice is defined and its different dimensions, emphasizing the labour aspects of foreign farm workers.

1.3.1 Globalization of the Food System

A food system can be defined as "the aggregate of food-related activities and the environments (political, socioeconomic, natural) within which these activities occur" (Pinstrup-Andersen and Watson, 2011). According to the FAO (2014), a food system "encompasses the entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products" (FAO, 2014). Food systems are complex and are studied by a range of different disciplines (InTegrate, 2018). From a sociological approach, they are closely related to politics, economics, and social structures; these features are considered to be part of the socio-economic environment which includes the elements of labour, capital, markets, income, equity, ethics, science, and technology (Strange, 2012).

Traditionally, geographical limits framed food-related activities as well as the environmental characteristics affecting those activities. However, growing exchange of goods and services around the globe, and the increasing interdependence of the world's economies as a result of globalization and trade agreements, have changed and are still changing the food system (Senauer and Venturini, 2005; Shetty, 2003a cited in FAO, 2004). Because of this, changes are occurring all along the food chain from production and processing to retail and marketing. The repercussions and depth of these transformations are occurring at different rates and paces all around the world; however, it seems that all countries appear to be moving towards the same destination (Kennedy et al., 2004).

Carolan (2012) explains how the Green Revolution, following World War II, created research and technology transfer initiatives. Along with these changes, disparities arose in different regions and countries with respect to access to land, water, and credit. In order to compete in the increasingly globalized marketplace, farmers looked to increase their productivity and reduce their operating costs through different strategies: the use of agro-chemicals to increase yields; the use of technology to scale production; accessing government subsidies; and, hiring cheap (usually immigrant) labour. Agricultural businesses and corporations supplying hybrid seed varieties, agro-chemicals, equipment and machinery became the big financial winners in this technical revolution. This has had a profound impact on the food system in Canada and around the world. Many Canadian-owned companies closed, and agriculture and the food system became increasingly influenced by foreign corporations (Qualman et al., 2018). Qualman et al., (2018) state that “if we compare Canadian agricultural policies today to those of a generation ago, deregulation, privatization, and state realignment are all plainly visible” (p. 118). This transformation has occurred under the frame of neoliberal policies. While production

output increases globally with increasing use of externally manufactured inputs, food commodity prices decrease and the cost of production rises, benefiting not only agri-businesses' profitability but also enhancing monopolistic tendencies (Winson, 1993).

Globalization is impacting the structure of farming around the world, with a move away from traditional family farms to corporate agri-businesses focused on serving export markets. According to Qualman et al., (2018), an export orientation has existed in Canada since European settlement; however, since the early 1990s efforts to maximize exportation scaled to a new level. One key moment that shaped this was the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement² (NAFTA) in 1994, which was an agreement to remove barriers to trade and investment between the USA, Canada, and Mexico (Escalante & González, 2018). The Province of Alberta, for example, is an important producer and exporter of products such as beef, cereal grains, and oil seeds, and is the third largest exporter of agri-food products in Canada, after Saskatchewan and Ontario (Alberta Government, 2018), contributing \$9.2 billion in GDP to Alberta's economy (Business in Calgary, 2021). Farms in Alberta are increasingly characterized as large scale, industrialized and capital-intensive operations, a trend which is occurring throughout Canada's Prairie Region (Statistics Canada, 2022).

In developing countries, one of the consequences of globalization of the food system has been peasant farmers' dispossession. From a sociological perspective, a peasant farmer is understood as a small-scale land-holder (Carolan, 2012). In the case of Mexico, the agricultural

² In Mexico: Tratado de Libre Comercio de América del Norte (TLCAN)

sector had a long history of being neglected by the Mexican government and NAFTA was seen as a viable solution to improve the Mexican economy. NAFTA was sold to Mexican farmers as an opportunity to grow and expand their operations by accessing new and wider markets; however, since its implementation, approximately 15 million Mexican peasants have been displaced from their farms (Bello, 2009, cited in Carolan, 2012). Even with the tragic consequences that NAFTA has had for small farmers, there are still 6.8 million Mexicans in agriculture related work (Statista, 2021). Gabriela Galindo (2021) states that Mexico is currently at the front line of a food war, trying to push back agri-food policies which are ultimately harming national food biodiversity (Galindo, 2021).

Mexican farmers have had an extremely difficult time competing with their neighbors in the North, who had government support to transform their farms in order to compete in the international sphere, while in Mexico, conditions remained pretty much the same (Binford, 2013; CEDRESSA, 2020; Guillén, 2012). Carolan (2012) adds that the Mexican government agreed to lower its support for small farmers in order to create conditions that shifted peasant farmers from working the land to working in factories (Binford, 2013). To this day, the agricultural sector in Mexico is in a deep crisis in which small farms are in a vulnerable position in a national and international context that is full of disparities and limitations (Carbajal, 2021). According to the *Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo Rural Sustentable y la Soberanía Alimentaria*³ (CEDRSSA) (2020), 65% of Mexican peasant farmers (representing one-third of the Mexican population) are considered to live between poverty and extreme poverty.

³ Center of Studies for Sustainable Rural Development and Food sovereignty (CEDRSSA)

The World Bank, one of the more enthusiastic promoters of the NAFTA agreement in the beginning, later reflected and recognized that Mexico was in an unequal position, in contrast to countries in the North, when the agreement was signed. In 2003, the World Bank released a report discussing the negative outcomes from Mexico's situation in which corresponding national policies and institutional reforms were absent (CEDRSSA, 2020). Daniel Lederman, co-author of the report and a senior economist at the Office of the Chief Economist for Latin America and the Caribbean, addressed this, saying, "NAFTA has been quite positive for export agriculture, but it has probably had little impact on small farmers in the southern states of Mexico, who have suffered a long history of social, political and economic neglect" (Lederman et al., 2003, para 14).

With an increasing number of peasant farmers unable to make a living from their land, unemployment in Mexico has grown exponentially, leading to an increased number of migrants trying to cross the border, first to the USA and later to Canada. In 2008, during a visit to California the former president of Mexico, Felipe Calderon, exposed Mexico's position with regards to this situation: "You have two economies. One economy is intensive in capital, which is the American economy. One economy is intensive in labour, which is the Mexican economy. We are two complementary economies, and that phenomenon is impossible to stop" (Binford, 2009, p. 504).

1.3.2 Labour in a Globalized Food System: The case of Canada and Mexico

Labour Precarity

Stephen Castles introduced the idea of a "New International Division of Labour" as a result of the post-World War II period (Binford, 2009). This refers to the reconfiguration of the economy in the face of globalization, allowing industries to relocate their production activities to

developing countries where costs were cheaper. Increases and improvements in transportation and communication technologies have facilitated the mobility of labour, thus creating a cheap and available workforce for employers.

In agriculture, Carolan (2012) identifies the Washington Consensus⁴ as a moment when, through neoliberal lenses, the figure of the peasant farmer was seen as a potential urban labour force. Given that intensive capital enterprises were able to produce enough food and the industries were growing, the role of peasant farmers was considered a waste of potential for the industry. However, job creation at the factories was often insufficient for the high demand for jobs due to the rising number of displaced peasant farmers. Such was the case in Mexico where, at first, there was a growth in the manufacturing sector, thanks to NAFTA, which provided many peasant farmers with positions in the city. However, soon after, due to the continuous decline of agricultural-based rural livelihoods, the income of small farmers decreased, leading to exponential growth in unemployment (Kennedy et al., 2004). Peasant farmers were forced to seek work in their neighboring countries in the north (InfoRural, 2020). Philippe Bourgois, quoted in Holmes (2013), describes a situation that evolved in Mexico with respect to corn markets:

⁴ The neoliberal economic formula's combination promoted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank in the 1980s and 1990s are known as the Washington Consensus. Mexico and many Latin-American countries adhered to the consensus consolidating the neoliberal model.

These indigenous communities used to supply local Mexican corn markets, but that valuable source of cash income and subsistence food supply has disappeared. Local markets have been flooded by corporate-grown U.S. corn imports and packaged convenience foods that benefit from unequal access to tax subsidies and genetic technologies, because neoliberal practice is inconsistent with its own free-market ideology. (p. xiv)

In search of ways to make a livelihood, peasant farmers left their communities and migrated first to the USA and then to Canada as an alternative when the labour market in the USA was saturated due to the increasing number of migrant workers. Amidst the changes occurring in the agricultural sector in Mexico, Canada promoted the Seasonal Workers Program as one of the streams of the Temporary Labour programs to address the labour shortages in agriculture; this offered Mexican farm workers another work option.

The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) and the Programa de Trabajadores Temporales Agrícolas (PTAT) [Program for Temporary Agricultural Workers]

The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) was initiated by the national Liberal government in 1966 as a stream of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) (ESDC, 2022b; Zhang et al., 2021). Initially, it was an agreement between the governments of Canada and Jamaica. Today, it has a partnership with Mexico, which is the leading participant country, and eleven Caribbean countries (ESDC, 2022c; Dunsworth, 2019). In Mexico, the matching program is known as *Programa de Trabajadores Temporales Agrícolas* (PTAT) [Program for Temporary Agricultural Workers]. It was created in 1974 as a program partnered

exclusively with Canada (SRE, 2020), and was preceded by the *Bracero* program with the United States in 1942.

The TFWP covers a wide diversity of industries, while the SAWP is one of the programs specifically designed for the agricultural sector. In TFWP, workers from many countries can participate, and their contracts can last up to four years. In contrast, in SAWP, only Caribbean Countries and Mexico participate, and their work permits are seasonal, which means workers perform seasonal activities for up to eight months (ESDC, 2022b).

SAWP is framed federally by the Immigration Refugee and Protection Act and is a labour market policy. SAWP also operates under the Canadian Labour Code that controls the conditions and terms of employment in Canada. SAWP is operated by Employment and Social Development Canada, through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWO) (ESDC, 2022b). At the provincial level it is framed by the employment standards that govern program implementations. The agreements are formalized in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) (Verma, 2003). SAWP is also based on the “Canadians first” principle, which means that if there is a vacancy, Canadians should be considered the first option to fill out the position (Vigod, 2015). To request foreign workers, Canadian farmers must first prove that after several attempts they were not able to find Canadian workers for their farms. They also need to prove that they have the adequate conditions to receive the workers; this includes housing, services, safe processes, and proper equipment, among other things. The Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) is the tool utilized to determine the feasibility of hiring a foreign worker.

PTAT is managed by the Secretary of Labour (STPS)⁵ through their relations with each of the Mexican Republic's states. This program also works closely in collaboration with the Mexican Secretary of Foreign Relations (SRE)⁶. According to the PTAT news portal from the Foreign Secretary of Mexico, the program has been a binational initiative that has helped to improve the relations between Canada and Mexico. It also states that it has served to create a model of international cooperation for labour, enabling a transition for immigrants in a way that is regulated, dignified and effective (SRE, 2020). The Labour Secretary deals with the structure of the program, while the Secretary of Foreign Relations serves as protective services for the workers.

To be considered as a possible candidate, Mexican applicants must live in a rural area and have knowledge in any of the following areas: crop production, horticulture, apiculture, and the livestock sector (STPS, 2018). The ideal candidate must also be between 25 and 45 years old, should be married or in consensual union, preferably with children; otherwise, the candidate must prove that he or she has financial dependents. A minimal level of education of three years of elementary school and a maximum of three years of junior high school are required. Mexico's Foreign Secretary is responsible for overseeing that the conditions of the agreement are met. At their consulates located strategically in some Canadian provinces, a team is established to observe and attend to the needs of the Mexican workers during their time on the farms.

Labour shortages in Canada and Alberta

⁵ Secretaría del Trabajo y Prevención Social (STPS) [Secretary of Labour and Social Prevention]

⁶ Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (SER) [Secretary of Foreign Relations]

The globalization of the food systems within a neoliberal context has been an important influence on the creation and expansion of migrant farmworker programs (Alkon, 2014; Bonanno & Cavalcanti 2014; Cohen, 2017; Preibisch, 2012; Rogaly, 2008 cited in Weiler et al., 2020). Canadian agriculture has a long history of labour shortages and, because of that, a long history of dependency on foreign farmworkers. During the Second World War, the Canadian government used the War Measures Act to force Japanese Canadians to work on farms (Ketchell, 2009 cited in Weiler et al., 2020). Otero and Preibish (2015) state how, in the 1960s, South Asian immigrants joined the British Columbia agricultural workforce, and by 2003 they comprised 98 percent of farmworkers. More recently, Caxaj and Cohen (2019) found 69,705 temporary agricultural workers in Canada, filling out approximately 75% agricultural positions. Contemporary migrant agricultural programs are “built on a long legacy of government intervention in the labour market to ease employer access to workers and amplify their marginalization” (Bagnell, 2001 cited in Weiler et al., 2020). Before the 20th century the majority of farm labour was performed by farm owners and their families, and agricultural labour was mostly unregulated. With the shift in the model of production, hired labour started to rise.

Alberta has long depended on foreign workers, especially in agriculture, railway, construction, in the beef industry, and domestic services (Danysk 1995; Thompson 1978; Thompson & Seager 1978; Laliberte & Satzewich 1999; Laliberte 2006; Hsiung & Nichol 2010; Barnetson & Foster, 2013). The provincial government has tried to solve this problem in different ways over time. For example, between 1950 and 1980, Métis groups and First Nations were forced to work in the northern Alberta on community farms. The Department of Labour also placed unemployed people, psychiatric patients, or people in jail in farm labour positions (Laliberte & Satzewich 1999; Satzewich 2007 cited in Weiler et al., 2020).

The use of out of province workers and international migrant labour has become a fundamental focus of Alberta labour policy in the predominant oil and gas driven economy. The government of Alberta has justified the increasing use of migrant programs through a narrative that is composed of three elements (Barnetson & Foster, 2013): 1) labour shortages cannot be filled up with local workers thus it is necessary to hire people from abroad; 2) local jobs are not threatened by foreigner workers; and, 3) migrant workers are treated fairly and are not being exploited. Barnetson and Foster (2013) demonstrate that not only does this narrative not convey reality, but that the logic behind it is to facilitate an inexpensive, disposable labour force, as evidenced by the Temporary Labour Programs (Barnetson & Foster, 2013). For example, in the meat processing plants of JBS Foods and Cargill in Alberta, migrant workers complained about the precarious working conditions during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Workers expressed concern about the lack of safety measures, saying that they could not change jobs easily due to work visas being tied to the employer and they couldn't afford to lose their jobs which supported their families (Herring, 2021; Nikiforuk, 2020). While temporary labour positions, such as those in meat plants, are different than seasonal farm placements, which fall under a protected program framed in a binational agreement, other factors place seasonal workers in precarious situations, such as the evaluations they receive from their employers at the end of their farm term. For example, in the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) a negative assessment could affect further possibilities of continuing in the program. Hence workers sometimes endure an overload of work and unsafe working conditions (Binford, 2013).

In Alberta, there has been a long struggle between farm workers and the provincial government which has been a traditionally right-wing, conservative government. While there have been several attempts to improve wages and working conditions for agricultural workers,

there has been resistance to cover farm workers by the same labour laws as other workers, which has been influenced by a farming lobby (Macdonald & Barnetson, 2016; Reid-Mussonet al., 2022).

Hiring workers through temporary programs has several perks for employers. For example, the accessibility to a pool of experienced and skilled workers to attend to their labour needs during peak seasons, saves on recruitment and training processes, flexibility by hiring workers to meet specific needs and deciding on the number of workers based on the labour fluctuation, and minimum responsibility towards employees for the long term. In addition, employers have a secure availability of a labour force through government of Canada programming.

According to Foster (2013), precarious residency status or partial citizenship (Vosko, 2010, cited in Foster, 2013) is one of the key aspects conditioning what some authors call “unfree” labour migration (Musson, 2018; Nakache, 2010; Weiler, 2017). This refers to individuals who have a permit to stay in Canada, in this case to work, but they don’t have the same rights as permanent residents or citizens, which can lead to challenges and limitations such as: access to government services and benefits; travel restrictions like going outside Canada and returning; inability to plan for the future due to their uncertain situation; and more specifically in this case, be limited by the type of job they can take and the impossibility of changing of jobs without jeopardizing their legal status. Moreover, because of their work visa limitation and their dependency on their employers, most workers are afraid of speaking up if they face poor working or living conditions; sometimes they might endure labour abuses or exploitation. Otero and Preibish (2015) put it this way:

The principal basis of migrants' unfreedom is their categorization as "foreign workers," a move that allows the state to legally deny them the rights and entitlements associated with citizenship and to impose restrictions upon their labour mobility, such as closed permits or requirements to live on their employer's property. (p.7)

This type of migration and labour law has fostered unequal transnational models of productions (Sharpe, 2020); the repercussion of this are wide. Among many things, workers are limited when it comes to their ability to unionize (Bartneson & Foster, 2013). Also, because of language barriers and their dependence on employers, workers have difficulty accessing health services, and when they are able to, it is rarely in a timely manner with the appropriate conditions (Bartneson & Foster, 2013; Holmes, 2003; Salami et al, 2015, 2016). For example, about accessing health services, Spitzer (2022) adds that even when migrant workers "are entitled to health services, they may not be adapted to their needs" (p 190).

Food Justice and Migrant Agricultural Labour

The agri-food system in Canada relies increasingly upon migrant farm workers (Caxaj & Cohen, 2019; Haley et al., 2020; Weiler & McLaughlin, 2017). Framed under the perspective of food justice and the equity and inclusion discourse that the Canadian Government promotes (Marsden, 2019; Perry, 2012), migrant farm workers not only have the right to fair conditions of work but also to have access to spaces where they can develop their life and build social bonds and experience cultural exchange (Weiler et al., 2016). The reality, however, tends to be the contrary. Research has exposed that migrant farm workers find themselves in vulnerable conditions both in their home country and in Canada (Binford, 2013; Salami et al., 2015; Weiler et al., 2017). Some authors go so far as to state that this is a modern version of slavery (Hochedez, 2021; Cohen, 2017).

As Foster (2013) expresses in his article “Temporary Foreign Workers: Issues in Integration and Inclusion”, migrant workers are generally excluded from most social dynamics because there are no policies that truly intend to address this situation. He utilizes the term “shadow population” to refer to those foreign workers living in Canada for a considerable time but who are not included in the official number of residents and do not have access to the same labour and living conditions and rights as other Canadian residents or citizens with legal status (Foster, 2013). Koc and Welsh (2001) add that “the feelings of belonging or the identification with the recipient society cannot be fulfilled without a complete integration (the ability of an individual or social group to use and contribute in all dimensions of the economic activity, social, cultural, and political in the society, without systemic barriers)” (p. 4).

Encalada (2019) writes that migrant workers are seen as a “just-in-time” solution. In addition, Salami et al. (2015) expressed that migrant workers are also regarded as disposable workforce, whose main function and value are understood under a utilitarian lens, focusing in terms of the work they perform. The temporality of their stay not only allows employers to have a source of workers at their convenience but also allows them to have a form of control over the workers. Spitzer (2022) explain the particular situation of seasonal farm workers:

SAWP workers generally live in on-farm housing provided by employers who further control their access to goods and services including food, telecommunication and banking services, health care and social activities. Rural location, workplace regulations such as curfews and limited access to vehicular transportation circumscribe their mobility, constraining access to services, goods and supports. (p. 22)

Given the precariousness of their employment, migrant workers tend to remain compliant and are therefore easy to exploit. The repercussions of this exploitation on temporary farm workers are

significant and diverse. Negative impacts on their health are frequently experienced and are aggravated by not having adequate access to the health system (Spitzer, 2022). Salami et al. (2015) describes the poor conditions of the housing, lack of sanitary facilities, language barriers, and mobility limitations, as the main reasons why they encounter constant health issues (see also Salami et al., 2016). The COVID-19 pandemic has made things even more difficult (Haley et al., 2020). Amidst the Canadian restrictions, farm workers had to sort out different requirements to enter the program during the pandemic; this meant among other things, an increase in costs (Spitzer, 2022). It also affected their health and safety due to crowded and inadequate working and living conditions, as exemplified by the death of farmworkers in one of Ontario's greenhouses as a result of unsafe conditions (Gamble, 2021).

Besides the physical impacts that workers tend to have in the health area, they also have mental and emotional burnout (Spitzer, 2022; Encalada, 2019; Salami, 2015). Because most workers have their rest area in the same place they work, it is difficult for them to disconnect from their work dynamics. Furthermore, the public and private areas of workers' lives are regulated by their employers (Perry, 2012). Encalada (2019) provides an example in Ontario, where she describes the situation of female migrant farm workers. These women are under constant monitoring, both in the work area and in their dorms. If a woman gets pregnant while her work stays, she is immediately sent back home.

Arturo Almanza, a farm worker in Ontario, talks about solitude as one of the most challenging aspects workers bear (La Grassa, 2021). Most of the workers migrate to Canada out of necessity, which means they leave their families for long periods. Emotionally, this creates deep discomfort and pain, and feelings of loneliness increase as a result of not having access to the local community (Encalada, 2019; Foster, 2013). If the fear of being deported is added, the

experience becomes highly stressful. Workers are constantly anxious about committing errors or not pleasing their employers, so they push their bodies and mental health to their limits (Salami, 2015).

When workers enroll in the temporary programs, they are assured that their rights will be protected and that there are going to be authorities from their countries attentive to any needs they may have. But in reality, this is usually not true. Most workers have reported a lack of solutions when reaching out to some authorities, and even reaching out may result in retaliation if the employer finds out (Spitzer, 2022; Binford, 2013); such is the case of migrant farm workers from Mexico who were rescued in Toronto from an international trafficking ring and now face deportation due to the legal gap in the immigration system of Canada that does not provide sufficient rights to workers (CBC News, 2023).

There is growing recognition of the need to develop a more socially just food system (e.g., Caxaj & Cohen, 2019, 2020; Perry, 2018; Weiler et al., 2015). Organizations such as The Migrant Worker Health Project, MAWC Farm Workers, and Justicia for Migrant Workers promote networking among institutions and NGOs to bridge services for temporary agricultural workers. These and other organizations facilitate migrant workers' participation in different spaces, enabling them to share their knowledge and experiences, as well as access information and counsel so they can negotiate better conditions with their employers. From a food justice lens, these actions are a form of resistance to the hegemonic view that shapes the food system in Canada. Through different movements, grassroots organizations and academic research, there are people documenting these experiences and supporting workers searching for a place to recreate themselves (Perry, 2018). Such is the case of the musical band "Latin Power Band" that amidst the restrictive circumstances found a way to play music as an opportunity to create community

(La Grassa, 2021). Through participatory initiatives, research has also played an important role in opening up channels for workers to express their ideas and petitions. For instance, Adam Perry (2018) utilized participatory theater as a way to not only carry out an innovative form of research, but also to explore in collaboration with workers' self-reflection and sharing parts of themselves with others. This and other efforts have contributed to strengthening the participatory agenda that aims to enable migrant workers in Canada to have a more visible role and to rethink their place in Canada's society (Loo, 2014; Perry, 2018; Weiler & McLaughlin, 2019; Weiler et al., 2015).

1.4 Methodology and Methods

This is a community-based and participatory research project which used a focused ethnographic approach. Ethnography is a term that has its origins from the Greek terms *ethos* meaning people and *grapho* meaning to write or describe (Murillo & Martínez, 2010). Thus, ethnographic research aims to understand reality through the eyes of the people who construct that specific reality (Gutiérrez, 2019). Comprehending the perspective of another person is not a simple task, for it requires an iterative revision of one's own positions in relation to what is observed and learned (Gutiérrez, 2019). Focused ethnography centers on specific elements within a great number of aspects (Lefebvre, 2018; Knoblauch, 2005; Mayan, 2009). In this study, I focused on the factors impacting Mexican seasonal agricultural workers' health and well-being, such as access to health services, culturally appropriate food, and cultural integration, as well as their motivations for participating in PTAT. I completed my practicum, as requirement for my Master of Arts in Community Engagement, at the Mexican Consulate in Calgary, which allowed me to understand how the program was managed and learn about some of the areas in which these farms are located.

1.4.1 Study Population and Sampling Method

I utilized both purposive and snowball sampling techniques to enroll nine male Mexican agricultural workers based in Alberta or that had participated in PTAT in Alberta. The 2022 season of PTAT runs from mid February and early March to December 15. I engaged with Mexican seasonal workers in Alberta from April 2022 to August 2022. Although the majority of participants in PTAT are male, I tried to include female participants in this research. However, I was unsuccessful in achieving this as women face stricter rules when it comes to engaging with people outside their workplace.

Through my practicum at the Mexican Consulate in Calgary, I was able to engage with workers. One of the tasks the Consulate asked me to do was to welcome workers at the airport in Edmonton, to provide contact information to the Consulate's office. In my first encounter with the workers I did what I was asked, and in some cases, I could tell the workers about my research. Interested workers gave me their phone numbers to discuss the study and its implications. For those that agreed to participate in the research, I also asked if they could refer me to other potential participants. From the airport encounters with approximately one hundred Mexican seasonal workers, only five agreed to participate, and one of those five referred me to another worker who also became a participant. I engaged with one more participant through Facebook, and coincidentally I met two more participants when shopping at Costco.

I also reached out to some NGOs working on similar topics, but most organizations did not have any contact with seasonal farm workers from Mexico. Only one organization did, but workers were distrustful and preferred not to participate.

1.4.2 Data Collection

Ethnography research employs a variety of tools for data collection in which it is possible to outline field diaries, interviews, observation, and the use of photos and videos. In my research, I used the PhotoVoice technique, which:

is typically used with marginalized populations that have been silenced in the political arena. Using ethnographic techniques that combine photography, critical dialogue, and experiential knowledge, participants reflect on and communicate their community's concerns to represent their culture, to expose social problems, and to ignite social changes. (Sutton-brown, 2014, p. 169)

PhotoVoice is similar to participatory video, in which participants become the authors of their message in a research process. Tamara Plush (2013) explains that these participatory techniques have the possibility of capturing the voice of marginalized groups with the potential of educating, persuading and advocating to bring about positive change. For recruitment, every time I had the chance to meet a potential participant, I first explained my research topic and objectives. Then, if potential participants were interested, I would describe the requirements of participating, specifically about PhotoVoice and the semi-structured interviews. If a person was still interested, I would then give them the consent form, and we would set a date to have a follow-up call to discuss questions and details of the PhotoVoice technique; the emphasis was to reflect about important elements that were part of the daily lives of workers, exploring the conditions that are part of how they fostered well-being. I asked the participants to capture moments, situations, and objects that represented something meaningful about their experience in PTAT and of Alberta. Anonymity was fundamental, so there was the condition of not portraying something that can disclose their identities. The images were discussed at the beginning of the follow-up semi-structured interviews, which were conducted in order to learn,

first hand, about farm workers' experiences in the PTAT program. Using the semi-structured format, I used a questions guide, but participants also had the liberty to include topics that they considered important. Of the nine interviews, two were conducted face-to-face and seven were conducted by cellphone. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

1.4.3 Data Analysis

There were two essential elements as part of the data analysis, the photos and the interviews. Both images and the interviews convey a message with discourse elements that help to understand, in this case, workers' experience and reality.

A life story, a literary text, a speech, a picture, etc., are messages that hold meaning. From a qualitative approach, the interpretative technique that is employed to discover such meaning is named content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018). This technique codifies and classifies diverse elements of the message to present categories that explain its significance. It denotes both the manifest content (what is said) and the latent meaning (what is said without intention) (Andréu, 2002; Cáceres, 2003). Content analysis is generally used in ethnography as it is an appropriate tool to analyze the information resulting from the interviews (Mayan, 2009) .

The interviews, which began with participants' description of the photos and why they were chosen, were transcribed verbatim. The text had repetitive words mentioned as a representation of a specific topic. I coded phrases and highlighted redundant words. When that happened, it was possible to create general ideas and identify categories that later led to subcategories. Within the nine interviews, it was possible to see similar experiences expressed with similar ideas.

In summary, the data analysis involved the following steps:

1. Translation of the interviews from Spanish into English

2. Interview coding (each time the interviewee or the interviewer expressed the same word, or idea, it received a code).
3. Important ideas highlighted.
4. Creation of central themes and subthemes based on a first analysis.
5. Organization of the highlighted ideas in the corresponding theme and subtheme.
6. Creation of categories based on the themes.
7. Second analysis and interpretation.
8. Writing up of the findings.

1.4.4 Research Limitations and Considerations

This thesis research had important limitations and factors to consider:

Sample size: For a qualitative study at the level of a master's program, nine participants are an acceptable number. I aimed to engage with more workers, however, but because they live and work in a controlled and restricted context, it was difficult to secure additional participants. Therefore, from around a hundred potential participants, only nine agreed to be involved in the research, and of the nine, two were no longer in PTAT and are currently permanent residents.

Recruitment: Outside of encounters made through the Consulate, engaging with workers was difficult. In addition, due to the restrictive conditions they face that could jeopardize their jobs, they were afraid to participate. When they learned about the research requirements, such as agreeing to have the interview recorded or signing a consent form, they preferred to avoid the risk. I also intended to include the female perspective, but I only had the opportunity to engage with two women at the airport but they could not speak with me because the foreman was already present.

The scheduling of the interviews: Work started early in the morning and the end of the work day often varied for the farm workers. So, finding a time and day when they the interviews could be conducted was difficult to arrange. We typically had to do the interviews either early in the morning or late at night, when their work shift ended, or on weekends. There was also the factor of privacy. Workers live with colleagues, so I had to be flexible to adapt my time to their possibilities when they could be alone.

The quality of the recordings: I conducted two interviews face-to-face and seven by phone. Unfortunately, the WIFI at the farms was not stable enough, so having a video interview was impossible. It also affected the quality of the recordings because on many occasions the sound got lost. This affected the transcription process because the software program did not recognize the words due to the lack of clarity. As a result, I had to do the transcriptions by hand. Transcription was also impacted by the fact that participants had different accents, used colloquial terms and for three of the participants, Mayan was their native language, although we conversed in Spanish. Intonation and emphasis on certain words or phrases was also reflected in the recordings.

Ethnographic approach: For the ethnographic approach, it would have been ideal to visit the farms to observe the social and cultural environment; however, the space where workers work and live is highly monitored, so it was impossible to meet them without raising awareness, which would have risked the confidentiality of participants. Also, some farms were located three or four hours from Edmonton, making it difficult for me to reach those places.

1.4.5. Ethical Considerations

Some of the considerations for my thesis research was informed consent from all participants before the interviews. Confidentiality was also a relevant aspect. At first, I would

meet workers either in person or through Facebook, and then I would explain the research and requirements to them. One of those requirements was taking pictures for the PhotoVoice technique. I explained what PhotoVoice was during the initial encounter. Then, if they were still interested, I would share the informed consent form for them to read and discuss any doubts they might have. To answer any questions they might have, we would text through WhatsApp to set a call and discuss them. If they still wanted to participate, we would arrange a day and time for the interview. The agreement was for them to share the pictures through WhatsApp prior to the discussion. Each time I read out loud the consent form and the requirements at the beginning of the interview. Two consent forms were signed because the interviews were conducted in person, and seven were through verbal consent because interviews were conducted by phone.

1.5 Positionality

Engaging in research means that the person's whole essence is being introduced to a new experience; the level of impact that the researcher can have with each new venture depends on the way in which the person sees and understands the world. I see my role as a facilitator rather than a researcher in the sense that we all create knowledge in a collaborative process. Especially coming from a country like Mexico, where the diversity can be overwhelming, it is easy to conclude that there is not a single voice, but rather many songs created in different tones, represented by people's backgrounds and personal stories. In that mosaic of richness, I grew up with the possibility of experiencing not only the fantastic cross-culturalism but also the horrifying disparities that characterized my country.

The extremes in which people live to this date marked my memory, making me want to be part of alternatives and solutions to create a fairer and more just world for everyone. That concern took me to different spaces and people. I had the opportunity to participate in several

activities, especially in rural areas where agriculture and its ramifications had a pivotal meaning in configuring social organization. With time and with the aid of like-minded people, my interests and concerns regarding the importance of agriculture became a focus of my studies and my work. Along the way, the faces, names, stories, hopes, sorrows, and dreams of many people have influenced and shaped who I am today.

All of the above-mentioned, have influenced the selection of my thesis research topic. The experience of seasonal Mexican farm workers in Alberta was not just the topic to fulfill a requirement to obtain my graduate certificate, it was also the remembrance of all those experiences that are parts of me. Therefore, I wrote this to communicate how grateful and humbled I am to have the possibility of serving as a bridge to have the Mexican workers' voices heard. I am grateful because I realize how fortunate I am in my personal life, and humbled because I realize how incredibly strong, resilient, kind, and courageous the people I talked to are. I truly desire that one day, they will be the ones talking, writing, and reaching out to the public, claiming their right to do so in a system that has continuously denied them that right.

1.6 Outline of the Following Chapters

This chapter provides a detailed introduction and background to my research on Mexican seasonal farm workers in Alberta. The establishment of the SAWP, as part of the Temporary Labour Programs, and the PTAT is described within the context of globalization of the food system and related key historic events and circumstances in Canada and Mexico. The importance of including the perspectives of workers in assessing the effectiveness of the foreign labour programs is discussed and highlighted as relates to this research in the province of Alberta, where there have been few such investigations. The chapter also includes an overview of my

theoretical framework for analysis, food justice, as well as the methodology and methods employed.

Chapter Two focuses on Mexican workers' motivations to enroll in PTAT, their experiences with the enrollment process, and their work experiences on farms in Alberta. A brief literature review about the impacts of globalization on the food system, particularly in Canada and Mexico, is presented in this chapter, as well as its relation to the creation of the Temporary Labour Programs in Canada, specifically the SAWP and PTAT, Mexico's matching program.

Chapter Three concentrates on Mexican seasonal farm workers' perceptions of the impacts of participating in the PTAT in Alberta on their overall health and well-being. A brief overview of the Government of Canada's definition of well-being precedes this part. I also introduced food justice as a theoretical lens that aims to rethink the role of farm workers in the Canadian food system in which the well-being of workers gains special attention.

In conclusion, in Chapter Four, I present a synopsis of the findings revealed through my research and the scholarly contribution this makes, as well as a discussion of further research possibilities related to this topic.

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Chapter Two: Motivations, Enrollment and Lived Experiences of Mexican Seasonal Farm Workers in Alberta

Abstract

Due to the labour shortages in agriculture, in 1966 the Government of Canada created the Seasonal Agricultural Labour Program (SAWP). Mexico is now the major partnering country and runs the matching *Programa de Trabajadores Agrícolas Temporales* (PTAT). Similar to other provinces in Canada, Alberta is increasingly reliant on migrant agricultural labourers. With the growing in the number of migrant workers in Alberta and across Canada, there are increasing concerns about their labour and living conditions. To improve labour programs so as to better serve foreign workers, it is critical to understand migrant workers' perspectives by having their voices heard. Most research on this topic to date has focused on Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia, which have the highest provincial numbers of migrant agriculture labourers; conversely, there have been few such investigations in Alberta. This qualitative, participatory research utilized a focused ethnographic approach and methods of PhotoVoice and semi-structured interviews to explore the lived experiences of nine Mexican seasonal agriculture workers who have participated in the PTAT in Alberta. Their context in Mexico, their motives for enrolling in the program and the dynamics they faced entering and working in Alberta amid the COVID-19 pandemic are explored. This research presents and analyzes the benefits and challenges they identify of participating in a bi-national labour agreement as well as their perception of their role in Canada's food system.

Keywords: Mexican migrant farm labourers; Seasonal Agriculture Workers Program; Programa de Trabajadores Agrícolas Temporales; Alberta; Canada

2.1 Introduction

In Canada, from the early 1990s onwards, governments have actively promoted policies to maximize agri-food exports through increasing productivity (Qualman et al., 2018). In order to expand the output and efficiency of production to be competitive in the global marketplace, agriculture in Canada has become increasingly dependent on external inputs. With the rising cost of manufactured inputs (predominantly fossil fuel based) and unpredictable and volatile commodity prices, farmers have responded to the cost-price squeeze through economies of scale approach. As farm size has increased, the number of farmers has steadily declined across the country, as has the availability of farm labour. Temporary labour programs, which enable foreign workers to enter and work in the country for limited periods, have been created to address labour shortages in various sectors; under these programs there are different streams. One such stream is the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) which was created in 1966 as part of a bi-national agreement with Jamaica and now also includes agreements with Mexico and other Caribbean countries. Mexico is currently the leading partner country, which runs the matching *Programa de Trabajadores Agrícolas Temporales* (PTAT) and accounts for 43.8% of foreign farm workers in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2022).

As the presence of foreign farm workers has been steadily increasing in Canada, so to has interest in knowing how government institutions manage these programs and how effectively they serve people who come to work here and make a significant contribution to Canada's workforce and economy. To better understand and evaluate these programs, previous research underlines the need to create a space for migrant workers' voices to be heard (Weiler & McLaughlin, 2019; Loo, 2014). To date, most of the studies examining seasonal foreign farm workers' perspectives have been conducted in Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia due to the

concentrated number of workers participating in farm operations within these jurisdictions (Beaumont, 2021; Encalada, 2019; Weiler et al., 2020). By comparison, there has been relatively little research on this topic conducted in the Province of Alberta.

This article aims to address this literature gap by presenting research that explored the experiences of Mexican seasonal farm workers participating in PTAT in Alberta. Using a focused ethnography approach, qualitative and participatory research was conducted with nine Mexican seasonal farm workers. Their narratives provide insights into their motivations and experiences of enrolling in PTAT, as well as their on-farm living and working conditions.

In the following section, a brief review of the literature is presented, beginning with an overview of the impact of globalization on the dynamics of the agricultural sector, particularly as it relates to farm labour in Canada and Mexico. Next, the establishment of the SAWP and the PTAT, as a result of the Canada-Mexico bi-national agreement, is discussed. A description of the methodology and methods follows this. In the findings section, workers' narratives about what motivated them to participate in the program, their experiences with the process of enrollment in PTAT, as well as their living and working conditions in Alberta are presented. This is followed by an analysis of these results and a summary and conclusion.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Globalization of the Food Systems and its Impacts in Alberta, Canada, and Mexico

A food system can be defined as "the aggregate of food-related activities and the environments (political, socioeconomic, natural) within which these activities occur" (Pinstrup-Andersen and Watson, 2011). Traditionally, geographical limits framed food-related activities as well as the environmental characteristics affecting those activities. However, globalization and

trade agreements have facilitated the cross-border movement of goods, information, financial capital, services and labour (Shetty, 2003a cited in FAO, 2004).

Castles introduced the idea of a “New International Division of Labour,” a process of economic globalization that began during the post-World War II period and enabled the relocation of production to developing countries where costs were cheaper (cited in Binford (2009, p.503). Increases and improvements in transportation and communication technologies facilitated the mobility of labour, thus creating a cheap and available workforce for employers. In the case of the agricultural sector, Carolan (2012) explains how the Green Revolution following World War II created research and technology transfer initiatives that aided the globalization of the food system. Along with these changes, disparities arose in different regions and countries with respect to access to land, water, and credit. In order to compete in the increasingly globalized marketplace, farmers looked to increase their productivity and reduce their operating costs through different strategies – the use of agro-chemicals to increase yields, the use of technology to scale production, accessing government subsidies, and hiring cheap (usually migrant) labour.

The Canadian Prairie Region, which includes the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, represents Canada's most extensive agriculture production region and is characterized by large-scale, export-oriented, specialized crop and livestock farming operations. According to Qualman et al. (2018), an export orientation has existed in Canada since European settlement; however, since the early 1990s, efforts to maximize exportation scaled to a new level. One pivotal moment that shaped this was the implementation of the North American Free Trade

Agreement⁷ (NAFTA) in 1994, which removed barriers to trade and investment between the USA, Canada, and Mexico (Escalante & González, 2018).

In developing countries, one of the consequences of globalization of the food system has been peasant farmers' dispossession, referring to the inability of workers to make a living from their land due to the impacts of neoliberal policies, consequently are forced to leave their communities in search of job opportunities. From a sociological perspective, a peasant farmer is understood as a small-scale land-holder (Carolan, 2012). In the case of Mexico, the agricultural sector had a long history of being neglected by the Mexican government, and NAFTA was seen as a viable solution to improve the Mexican economy. NAFTA was promoted to Mexican farmers as an opportunity to grow their operations by accessing new and wider markets; however, Mexican farmers have had an extremely difficult time competing with their neighbors to the north who had government support to transform their farms in order to compete in the international sphere. In Mexico, conditions remained pretty much the same (Binford, 2013; CEDRESSA, 2020; Guillén, 2012).

Carolan (2012) identifies the Washington Consensus⁸ as a moment when, through a neoliberal lens, the figure of peasant farmers was seen as a potential urban industrial labour force. However, job creation in the factories in Mexico was insufficient for the high demand for jobs due to the rising number of displaced peasant farmers. With an increasing number of

⁷ In Mexico: Tratado de Libre Comercio de América del Norte (TLCAN)

⁸ The neoliberal economic formulas combination promoted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank in the 1980s and 1990s are known as the Washington Consensus. Mexico as many Latin-American countries adhered to the consensus consolidating the neoliberal model.

peasant farmers unable to make a living from their land or in urban centres, unemployment in Mexico has grown exponentially, leading to escalating numbers of migrants trying to cross the northern border, initially to the United States and later also to Canada, where labour shortages have been an important influence on the creation and expansion of migrant farmworkers programs (Alkon, 2014; Cohen, 2017; Preibisch, 2012; Rogaly, 2008 cited in Weiler et al., 2020). In 2008, during a visit to California the former president of Mexico, Felipe Calderon, exposed Mexico's position with regards to this situation: "You have two economies. One economy is intensive in capital, which is the American economy. One economy is intensive in labour, which is the Mexican economy. We are two complementary economies, and that phenomenon is impossible to stop" (Binford, 2009, p. 504).

2.2.2 Labour Shortages in Canada's Agriculture Sector and the Creation of Bi-national Labour Agreements

Canadian agriculture has a long history of labour shortages and, because of that, a long history of dependency on foreign farmworkers. For example, during the Second World War, the Canadian government used the War Measures Act to force Japanese Canadians to work on farms (Ketchell, 2009 cited in Weiler et al., 2020). Otero and Preibisch (2015) state how, in the 1960s, South Asian immigrants became an essential part of the British Columbia agricultural workforce, and by 2003 they comprised 98 percent of farmworkers. More recently, Caxaj and Cohen identified 69,705 foreign agricultural workers in Canada, filling approximately 75% agricultural positions (Caxaj & Cohen, 2019).

The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) was initiated by the national Liberal government in 1966 as a stream of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (Zhang et al., 2021). Initially, it was an agreement between the governments of Canada and Jamaica, but

has since expanded to include Mexico and other Caribbean countries. Currently, Mexico is the leading partner country which runs the matching *Programa de Trabajadores Temporales Agrícolas*⁹(PTAT) and accounts for 43.8% of seasonal farm workers in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2022; Dunsworth, 2019).

Mexico's PTAT program was created in 1974 exclusively with Canada. PTAT is managed by the Secretary of Labour¹⁰ (STPS, 2020) through their relations with each of the Mexican Republic's states. This program also works closely in collaboration with the Mexican Secretary of Foreign Relations (SRE)¹¹. The Labour Secretary deals with the structure of the program, while the SER oversees that the conditions of the agreement are met.

The Province of Alberta has long depended on foreign workers, especially in agriculture, railway, construction, and domestic services (Barnesotn & Foster, 2013). Low wages, long hours and poor working conditions are some of the reasons why interest in farm labour positions has been declining in Alberta and across Canada (Marsden, 2019). The provincial government has tried to solve labour shortages through different ways over time. For example, between 1950 and 1980, Métis groups and First Nations were forced to work in the northern Alberta on community farms. The Department of Labour also placed unemployed people, psychiatric patients, or people in jail in farm labour positions (Satzewich 2007, cited in Weiler et al., 2020).

More recently, the use of out-of-province workers and international migrant labour has become a fundamental focus of Alberta labour policy. In 2022, the SER (2022) reported that

⁹ PTAT is a matching program of SAWP run by the Mexican Government. Workers participating in PTAT, like seasonal workers, do not have access to permanent residency, unlike temporary foreign workers who can have a work visa or two years and then apply for permanent residency.

¹⁰ Secretaría del Trabajo y Prevención Social (STPS) [Secretary of Labour and Social Prevention]

¹¹ Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (SER) [Secretary of Foreign Relations]

1,266 workers participated in agricultural related activities in Alberta through PTAT. According to Barnetson & Foster (2013), the government of Alberta has justified the increasing use of migrant programs through a narrative that is composed of three elements: 1) labour shortages cannot be filled up with local workers thus it is necessary to hire people from abroad; 2) local jobs are not threatened by foreigner workers; and, 3) migrant workers are treated fairly and are not being exploited. These authors conclude that this has led to increasing reliance upon an inexpensive, disposable labour force. The Government of Canada has repeatedly said foreign farm workers are an essential part of Canada's agriculture; however, seasonal workers in the PTAT or SWAP are not eligible to apply for permanent residency that is being offered through federal pilot program (Government of Canada, 2023) to attract and retain temporary farm workers (Osman, 2023).

As the number of foreign temporary workers rises in Alberta and across Canada, so do the concerns about their living and working conditions. Investigations have shown that many migrant agriculture workers live and work in unsafe and inappropriate conditions (Encalada, 2019; Salami et al., 2015; Weiler & McLaughlin, 2019). For example, in Ontario, Beaumont (2021) exposed the hazardous conditions farmworkers face at the greenhouses, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the health risks due to the lack of protective equipment. In addition, Spitzer (2022), talks about Canada's Auditor General report in Ontario, where 76 per cent of the reviewed files had "no or low-quality evidence that employers were complying with COVID-19 protocols for MAW¹²" (p. 24).

¹² Migrant Agricultural Workers.

Most research on migrant agriculture labourers has been conducted in British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec (Caxaj & Cohen, 2019; Marsden, 2019), where most farm workers concentrate. Comparatively, there has been limited research conducted on this topic in Alberta. Regardless of the location, it is challenging to engage with migrant workers in a research context due to language barriers, strict employer and workplace surveillance, and workers' fear of reprisals for speaking up.

2.3 Methodology and Methods

This qualitative, participatory research utilized a focused ethnographic approach and methods of PhotoVoice and semi-structured interviews to explore the lived experiences of Mexican farm workers participating in PTAT in the Province of Alberta. Recruitment was carried out through purposive and snowball sampling techniques, and a social media posting on Facebook¹³. All participants recruited for this research were male. Attempts were made to include women in the research but none were successful. Overall, there are far fewer women enrolled in the PTAT and according to Encalada (2019) they face more restrictive and scrutinized environments.

Following recruitment and previous to the interviews, details about the research methods were shared with the participants by phone. At this time, participants were asked to take photos capturing elements of their work, living situations and overall experience in Alberta. Discussion of images from the PhotoVoice activity was discussed at the beginning of the interviews,

¹³ As part of my graduate degree requirement, from August 2021 to April 2022, I completed a practicum placement with the Mexican Consulate in Calgary, which oversees the PTAT program, though the practicum, I was able to engage with approximately 100 Mexican seasonal agriculture workers arriving at Edmonton's airport; five agreed to participate in the research. Later, a participant referred me to another person who agreed to participate. In addition, I engaged with one participant through Facebook and met two more participants randomly at a store.

followed by a semi-structured interview format in which I posed certain questions and topics but interviewees were encouraged to raise any additional topics or issues they deemed relevant. Two interviews were conducted face-to-face but the remaining seven were conducted by phone because the distance to the farms from my location in Edmonton, the lack of privacy on-farm for the workers, and the COVID-19 restrictions. Interviews lasted from approximately 40 minutes to 90 minutes and were carried out from April to August 2022. The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim in Spanish, and translated into English¹⁴.

The interviews were analyzed using both inductive and deductive data analysis. First, general categories were created based on the literature about temporary farm workers. Those categories were later refined and added to from the transcript data, generating the creation of final categories and subcategories.

2.4 Findings

This section presents the results generated through the PhotoVoice activity and follow-up semi-structured interviews with nine Mexican participants of PTAT in the province of Alberta. The findings provide information about workers' motivations for applying to the PTAT, their experience during the application process, and the benefits and challenges of being part of the program, including their living and working conditions. Because of the time when this research was conducted, their experiences amidst the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic were also explored. Finally, participants were asked to comment on their role in Canada's food system. A

¹⁴ The translation was challenging because many local expressions have contextual meanings that are difficult to explain in English. Adding to this, some participants had an accent that was difficult to understand because Mayan is their first language. What is more, the phone connection was bad, and the audios were not easy to follow. Consequently, transcription had to be done by hand since transcription software could only identify a few words.

discussion of these findings and a comparison with research conducted in other provinces are presented in the following section.

2.4.1 Participants Profile and Work Experiences

The nine participants who participated in this research are from communities in rural areas of Mexico and have connections to farming, either owning their own land or working on farms in Mexico. Hence, they all had prior agriculture knowledge and experience, which is a requirement of the PTAT. Applicants to the PTAT are required to write and pass an exam in order to demonstrate they have sufficient knowledge to perform the work tasks (SRE, 2022).

Table 1 presents information concerning each participant's age and work experience. Participants ranged in age from 30 to 55, with the highest proportion being in the 40 - 45 range. The shortest work experience of participants in the PTAT was four years, and the longest was over thirteen years. On average most participants had between five to seven years of experience in the program. Six participants had participated in the program in other provinces, including Manitoba, British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia.

Participants were involved in a variety of agriculture operations in Alberta: six were employed in apiaries and honey production (see Figure 1), one participant worked in a silviculture operation, and two were involved primarily in vegetable production. For further details, see Table 1 below.

Table 1.

Participants profile and work experiences

Participants	Age	Years in the program	Experiences in PTAT in other Provinces	Currently working in Alberta	Current farm work	Work experience in another agricultural sector

1	30-35 years	< 5	Yes	No	Diversity of Vegetables	Yes
2	40-45 years	> 10	No	Yes	Former farm workers with bees	Yes
3	40-45 years	> 5	No	Yes	Former farm workers with bees	Yes
4	45-50 years	> 10	Yes	Yes	Bees	No
5	50-55 years	< 10	Yes	Yes	Tubers	Yes
6	45-50 years	> 5	Yes	Yes	Bees	Yes
7	45-50 years	> 10	No	Yes	Bees	Yes
8	45-50 years	< 10	Yes	Yes	Bees	Yes
9	35-40 years	< 5	Yes	Yes	Pine Cultivation	Yes



Figure 1. Bee workers.

2.4.2 Workers' Motivations to Enroll in PTAT

The research participants identified a number of benefits of enrolling in the PTAT program: economic gain, legal work visa, a secure job, learning opportunities, and seasonality of the work. Details on the results for each of these themes are presented below.

Economic Gain

Limited and precarious employment opportunities in Mexico are the main reasons motivating participants in this research to apply for work through the PTAT. Farm income or income from farm labour positions in Mexico was described as precarious – irregular, uncertain and insufficient to meet basic needs. One participant shared their experiences:

(...) well, partly because in the market [in Mexico], there is not much work. Only a few days. You are not going to believe me, but there are weeks when there is no work. And that was the reason. With the earnings from your job, sometimes it is not enough, not even to eat. (Participant 5)

As a result, many have looked for other employment and remunerative activities in Mexico.

Participant 2 commented: “First, I worked in the fields, then I became a taxi driver.” Two of the most common off-farm jobs participants identified were driving a taxi or working in construction. Of the nine research participants, four are still involved in agricultural-related activities in Mexico, mainly because they have land of their own, which they maintain with the support of their family and the money earned through the PTAT work.

Enrolling in the PTAT was an option that all considered to be a viable opportunity to increase their income; as one participant commented, “By coming here and just by sending 10 dollars [home], [with] the exchange rate...it's a lot that you can do with that money in Mexico”. (Participant 8)

Legal Work Visa and Job Security

Some participants did not consider working in the United States because it is difficult to obtain a work visa, and entering illegally to the country is risky and dangerous. Finding work as an illegal worker can also be challenging, and even if you do find a job, you live in constant fear of being detained and deported. Participant 8 explained why he chose to enroll in PTAT:

(...) my intention was to finish high school and then go to the United States illegally. But since my father was already participating in this program, he said we would come legally and that it was better to work with papers. That is why I decided to come.

Another participant explains it was his mother who, knowing other acquaintances' experiences, motivated him to avoid crossing the border to the USA as a *mojado* (a person who crosses the border illegally) and look at the PTAT as an alternative.

Participants who have had the experience of illegally migrating to the USA or have close relations that have experienced being illegal workers, said that having a secure job to come to is an important benefit of being part of the PTAT, as there are immediate expenses to cover. One participant explains:

You don't come on an adventure, you have a job, and you have a place to live. You have a house and salary; everything is safe, and the only thing you have to do is work.

(Participant 2)

Seasonal Work

The possibility of working seasonally for up to eight months and then having the chance to go back home until the following employment opportunity is something that workers value about the PTAT program. When working illegally in the United States, by contrast, people

usually stay for several years to save money because crossing the border is risky, and they might not be able to come back. As one participant commented:

Well here, in this program [PTAT], everything is legal... [and] it is seasonal. You can return to see your family, spend time with my kids. If I go to the USA, the most probable thing is that I would go illegally, and I would have to stay there for around five years.

(Participant 1)

Two participants commented that while they feel the time away from their family during the working months is difficult, once in Mexico, they can spend more concentrated time with their loved ones. After a work season in Canada, they have more freedom to organize their time and be with their family. If they just stayed and worked in Mexico in other jobs, such as construction, the work would be demanding and for less pay, and most likely in communities away from their home, where they would have to stay for some time to earn enough money.

Learning Opportunities

Three participants spoke about the opportunities to learn about new machinery and technologies while working in Alberta. This has enabled them to gain valuable knowledge and skills, and they have considered incorporating some of this into their farming operations in Mexico. In addition, one participant talked about the benefits of visiting another country and learning from a different culture and community other than their own.

2.4.3 Process of Enrollment in the PTAT

Although information is available on the Mexican Foreign Secretary and Labour Secretary of Mexico websites, eight participants reported that guidance from relatives, friends, or acquaintances was crucial for navigating the application process for PTAT. Participants described the application process as proceeding in the following order. First, you go to the

nearest Labour Secretary's office to ask what is needed to enter the program or present the required documents if you already have them. Second, once the required documents are submitted, they must pass an agriculture knowledge exam. Third, applicants must also pass a medical exam to determine if they are healthy and can do the required physical work. Four, having met the previous requirements, you are placed on a waiting list of candidates. Finally, the Labour Secretary of Mexico will contact them if there is a suitable vacant position. But, as participants explained, this process is not always as straightforward as it appears, and they encountered several common difficulties in navigating through this process, as outlined below.

Lack of Clarity and Unpredictable Government Assistance

Participants said that while the information is on the Government web portals, some specifications or instructions were unclear. For example, once they submitted all the necessary documents, participants commented that they usually needed to regularly visit the government offices to inquire about the status of their applications as communication with applicants was not always guaranteed. Two participants mentioned that they found they were accepted in PTAT through a list placed outside the Labour Regional Office rather than being informed directly.

Despite meeting the criteria outlined for acceptance into the program, some participants commented that this did not necessarily guarantee approval of their application. For example, one participant explained how he had applied for the program twice, with two different results. In his first application, he submitted a diploma that was a level of study higher than the one requested in the requirements listed on the Labour Secretary web page. His application was rejected. He removed the diploma from the application on his second attempt and was accepted. He is still unsure if that was the reason. Another worker was able to enter the program having

completed a bachelor's degree, which is significantly higher than the education requirement. Overall, participants perceived a lack of clarity concerning these requirements.

In four interviews, participants spoke about the variable reception they received in the government offices, which depended on who was staffing them. Some were negative experiences, while others expressed gratitude for the government staffs' help.

Distance Between Participants' Communities and the Labour Secretary Offices

Some participants, especially those with more than ten years in the program, said there were previously few Labour Secretary offices, only in some capital cities of some Mexican states. This often resulted in applicants travelling long distances to the offices and incurring related expenses. Either they had some money saved which could be used for this, or they had to seek out a loan. Even now, a participant commented that there was no public transport and poor road conditions in his community, and that people depended on others with personal vehicles to travel outside the community. He describes his situation:

Where I am from, there are no jobs in the area. It is a remote place. It is really far, and there is no public transport like a van or something special. There are rural trucks; if you are lucky, one is going out that day. If not, then you need to see how you can do it.

(Participant 6)

The same participant said that office staff didn't consider this reality, and he was dismissed for what he thought were minor details and then asked to return on several occasions. For some, this was also complicated because they were working at the time of applying. Hence, asking permission to take time off to travel to government offices or start acquiring a needed document was not always easy or a given. Participant 4 recalls:

I was told that between this and that date you needed to come to the office. Then I was working in construction in a small town, really far, like 6 hours far, and I told the person in charge, “I have to go”, but then, I didn’t know if I would be selected.

2.4.4 The Impacts of COVID-19

When the Pandemic began, the Government of Canada recognized foreign farm workers as essential workers and were permitted to enter the country during the first part of the pandemic. However, farm workers from Mexico had several challenges meeting the requirements to enter Canada. They needed to present a negative PCR test at the port of entry and at the time, these tests were available in clinics and hospitals in Mexico, but the price was high. Thus, for most workers, the budget they had for their upcoming travels was not enough, and many had to use the money they saved for other purposes, while others had to seek out loans. In addition, they needed to download the app of ArriveCan and fill out the required information, which caused them additional stress. A participant narrates his experience:

You had to download some apps of ArriveCan, and fill out some forms. The thing is that sometimes you don’t know [enough] English. I printed a code, but they told me it wasn’t valid and that I needed to use my cellphone and have a password. I was really nervous, and I wasn’t able [to understand] (...) they gave us some forms I didn’t even know what they were for. (Participant 4)

Other workers had a problem meeting the 72-hour validity requirement of the COVID-19 PCR test. Getting the tests done where available and travelling some distances made achieving the 72-hour timeframe difficult. To complicate the situation even more, Mexico did not have vaccines

then¹⁵, so workers arriving in Canada needed to quarantine for 14 days. Although they did receive a partial payment from their employer for this time in quarantine, workers' main objective was to save as much as possible, especially under the costly travel requirements. A participant expressed what he experienced:

It was very complicated. To start with, it affected us economically, because the Labour Secretary asked us for a PCR. We had to present a test in Mexico, and take it to the Secretary so they could verify that we were healthy, and we also had to take it to the airport so we could board. At the airport we had another test and we had to quarantine for two weeks [after arriving]. We got paid only 60 hours for those two weeks.

(Participant 9)

Once on the farms, participants said no special pandemic safety measures were provided. Additionally, one participant said that the crowded living conditions of the housing he was in facilitated the spread of illness, and any work-related measures taken by his employer were minimal. Participants all commented that the local pandemic restrictions restricted their opportunities to travel off-farm.

Workers were more prepared in the second season after the pandemic began and knew how to navigate the requirements more efficiently. Moreover, most of them already had the two vaccines, so they did not need to undergo quarantine again.

2.4.5 On-Farm Work and Life Routines

¹⁵ When the Pandemic started, Mexico did not have vaccines. When finally, vaccines were available, the Government of Mexico administrated them by group ages and most of the vaccines were not recognized by Canada. It was much later that vaccines were available and they started to provide them by age groups. In my case, to meet the requirements to enter as an international student, I had to travel to the USA to obtain one of the accepted vaccines.

Work and life on the farms can be repetitive. The nine participants narrated a similar routine, starting between 6 am and 8 am and ending between 5 pm to 10 pm, depending on the work duties and demands. Workers' contracts indicate that eight hours is the standard work schedule; however, if required and as long it does not represent a threat to workers' health, workers could be asked to cover extra hours. All agreed that it is not uncommon to work 10 hours, sometimes even 14 hours, six days a week, and they did not know ahead of time how many hours they would be required to work each day. One participant describes his work routine¹⁶ at an apiary and honey-producing farm:

We work from Monday to Saturday, and sometimes, during harvest time, or when we have to move the bees, you can be heading back at 8 or 9 pm. Then Sundays, it's your day to rest. It's the only day we have to do the laundry, clean the house and those things.

(Participant 4)

The workers' contract states that employers need to provide transportation to enable the workers to buy groceries. Most transportation in this regard involved either the employer or another employee driving them to a grocery store in a nearby town or city. The nine participants concurred that because of their demanding work days, they usually needed to get their groceries and cook their food on Sundays for the week. However, shopping for food was limited by access to transportation and their dependence on the employer, as was explained by one participant:

(...) [our] employer does what is convenient for him. He takes us to the nearest town. We have struggled a lot in that aspect [buying food]. We have told him that it is more convenient for us to go to Edmonton, even if it is only once every 15 days [instead of

¹⁶ All participants agreed that the work schedules vary depending on the different tasks.

each week]. Because [in Edmonton] there are many more Mexican products and cheaper. But our employer says it costs him more. He has to buy more gas and pay a driver (...), then he takes us to the nearest town, even if that means we have to buy [higher priced] products. (Participant 9)

The employment contracts also state that employers must provide clean and proper housing for workers with the necessary equipment. Of the nine participants, three expressed satisfaction with their accommodation, while others found it unacceptable: “We don’t have space or time, mainly the space. We are living 20 people in a house, and we only have three stoves...” (Participant 9).

2.4.6 Lack of Institutional Support

While the Labour Secretary deals with the requirements and enrolling process in Mexico, the Foreign Affairs Secretary, through their consulates located in different regions of Canada, is the agency in charge of observing workers’ conditions and providing support in case a situation that endangers workers occurs. Participants recognize the importance of the consulates; however, there is a general perception that there is limited interest in responding to workers’ requests. The shared feeling among the participants is that the Consulate in Calgary could be more present at the farms and improve how they provide support.

2.4.7 Evaluation at the End of the Season

The employer evaluates the workers enrolled in the PTAT at the end of each season. This appraisal determines if the work was well done and if the worker is suited to work on that farm. However, it could also affect their continuity in the program since the Mexican authorities weigh negative evaluations heavily when considering a renewal of work visa. Evaluations are thus a means of exerting control over the workers. Furthermore, the fear of being expelled from the program generates anxiety, causing workers to be overly compliant with employers’ demands in

order to prove their worthiness, such as putting in their long work days with little time to rest. The nine participants said they only have one day off a week, and they usually use that day to tend to domestic duties, which does not allow much time for other activities.

Farm work is physically demanding, and Mexican seasonal farmworkers will push their bodies' limits to be recognized for a well-done job and to secure their spot at the farms. The following extract captures one participant's experience:

Each year the patrón [employer] asks for me. Yes, and that is a good thing. And when he tells you to do something, you have to do your best, so he notices your work so that he asks for you again the following year. (Participant 7)

2.4.8 Participants' Perspectives on Their Role in Canada's Agri-Food System

Participants in this research were asked about their perceptions of their role in Alberta's agriculture and food system and the broader globalized food system of which Canada and Mexico are a part. All participants commented that they felt they played a fundamental role in the food system. Their labour, even though it is not always valued or paid well, is essential to agriculture in Canada. One participant, who worked in a silviculture operation, explains:

The tree that is ready to reforest (...) to me represents a great part of life. All the work we are going to do is very important because, for me, it represents the planet's well-being. In Canada, wood is indispensable (...). I don't know. I mean, it is something really important to the growth of Canada and the whole world. For me, in that sense. I am very proud of the work I do. In reality, it represents life itself. (Participant 9)



Figure 2. Participant shows a pine ready to be planted.

All participants were proud of their work and were aware that it is hard work that many people, at least in Canada, do not want to do. Four workers said that in their experience, an average Mexican worker does the work of two or more Canadian workers; hence, why most employers value their work. One participant expressed it like this:

Well, the role we do, not any person does it, not any Canadian. Because, well, the patrón has told me that we are good, “number 1”, because, he says, “I have had Canadian workers, but I have to let them go. They work one hour, and then they go to the shade when it is hot. The people here, they don’t want to work”. Yes, we are very good.

(Participant 5)

Participants recognize that the money they bring back to Mexico is essential for the economy and the survival of their families and communities. They added that as seasonal workers, they are vulnerable compared to Canadian workers, who might have more leverage to negotiate their

labour conditions. Nevertheless, they are willing to work hard and accept the conditions of employment to secure their place for the next season. When assessing the overall benefits and challenges, participants agreed that enrollment in PTAT offers better salaries and work conditions than they would have in their home country.

2.5 Discussion

This section presents the analysis of the findings on seasonal Mexican farm workers' experiences of enrolling and participating in the PTAT in the Province of Alberta. What participants expressed through their photos and narratives narrations supports what authors like Caxaj and Cohen (2019), Encalada (2019), Otero and Priebish (2015) have written about temporary labour programs, particularly about the vulnerability workers face because of the lack of efficient mechanisms to ensure workers rights, labour and living conditions.

The Mexican seasonal farm workers' comments about the reasons they seek work in Alberta through the PTAT echoes what Encalada (2019) has written about the precarious incomes available to them in their home countries. Economic need due to the lack of jobs and adequate income in Mexico was identified by participants in this research as the main reason for enrolling in the program. According to the CEDRESSA's report (2020), the neglect of the Mexican agricultural sector creates a financial vulnerability for farmers and their families, who live between poverty and extreme poverty and need to look for alternative sources of income. Carolan (2012) links globalization of agriculture to the negative impacts on local economies and the increased vulnerability of peasant farmers worldwide.

The Labour Secretary of Mexico (STPS, 2018) states that the governments of Mexico and Canada have worked to create an attractive program where Canadian employers and farm workers from Mexico can gain mutual benefits. An international employment option that is

framed by a legal agreement is something that workers value since the dangers of crossing to the United States illegally is well known by members of rural communities. The binational agreement between Canada and Mexico offers Mexican workers a work visa, up to eight months of work and guaranteed income. These aspects of the PTAT program appealed to and attracted research participants. Nevertheless, as Barnetson and Foster (2013) assert, these temporary labour programs lack consistency in assuring workers' rights.

Encalada (2019) states that workers are seen as a "just-in-time solution," while Salami et al. (2015) add that foreign temporary workers are regarded as a "disposable workforce." Interviewees agreed with these assessments; though they believe their work as essential for the Canadian food system, they also feel they are viewed as a cheap labour force with no long term job security. Weiler and McLaughlin (2019) describe how seasonal work visas create vulnerability for farm workers compared to temporary workers, as they aren't eligible to apply for permanent residency even under the recent agri-food pilot program launched by the federal government to retain temporary farm workers (Government of Canada, 2023). The impossibility of achieving longer term contracts or permanent residency places seasonal workers in a precarious position since they depend on their employer's willingness to provide favorable end of year evaluations and returning seasonal work. One participant confirmed this by commenting about the need to perform well so that the employer could write a good evaluation and asks for him again. This affirms Barnetson and Foster's (2013) assertion that employers have a high level of control over the workers. These authors add that employers might prefer to hire foreign workers because "of perceived advantages over domestic (i.e. Canadian) workers, such as lower expectations, limited mobility, and reduced work-place power" (Barnetson & Foster, 2013, p. 350).

Participants' comments about not being acknowledged or heard is partly a result of the lack of institutional support and presence. Caxaj and Cohen (2019) and Mardesen (2019) concur that although there is a commitment from government institutions from both countries to ensure workers have fair labour and living conditions, government monitoring of this is largely absent. Participants in this research referred to crowded housing, limited cooking facilities and limited access to transportation as two issues influencing the quality of their everyday living conditions and their health (Weiler & McLaughlin, cited in Mardesen, 2019). When asked if they take their concerns about these issues to the supervising authorities, in this case the Mexican Consulate in Calgary, they responded that don't want to be viewed negatively by the authorities or their employers and, furthermore, they were unlikely to have their concerns addressed.

Although the Government of Canada assures seasonal farm workers are important to Canada and, therefore, supported by the system, reality conveys the contrary. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Canada declared seasonal foreign workers essential and granted Mexican workers an exemption to the entry restrictions. However, there needed to be more support to help participants of the PTAT to navigate the difficulties of meeting the COVID-19 entry requirements. The discourse about workers being essential remained superficial since no real measures were adopted to support workers' in fulfill the entry requirements or guarantee safe work and living conditions on farms. Institutional involvement during the working season is limited. Research participants' comments about their experiences during this time detail their difficulties in navigating the process, which concurs with Encalada's (2022) findings. One of the most common observations by interviewees was about the costs associated with applying for the PTAT and the financial losses incurred during the quarantine. Even if they were successful and granted entry to the country, they had to quarantine for two

weeks with limited pay. The numbers pre- and post-pandemic speak to these difficulties: in 2019, 26,407 seasonal farm workers from Mexico participated in the program in Canada; in 2020, the number decreased to 22,130, however is slowly recovering. In 2021, 24,1558 workers participated in PTAT and in 2022 the number increased to 25,669 participants (SRE, 2022). Research results from this study and others indicate that services need to be improved to better meet foreign workers' needs within an appropriate time frame, both in Canada and Mexico (Spitzer, 2022; Weiler & McLaughlin, 2019; Binford, 2013). In addition, structural barriers create difficulties for workers to meet bureaucratic demands; as Encalda (2022) and Spitzer (2022) states, workers experience limitations in their home country to access basic services, thus, face challenges in meeting the program requirements.

2.6 Conclusion

Seasonal workers are essential to the agricultural sector in Canada. Through temporary worker programs, there are several streams that allow employers to hire workers from different parts of the world. The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) is one of these which partners with several Caribbean countries and Mexico, which accounts for the highest number of foreign seasonal agriculture workers in Canada through its matching *Programa de Trabajadores Agrícolas Temporales* (PTAT). Despite Mexican migrant workers' contributions to Canada's agriculture sector, few studies have used a participatory research approach to explore their motivations for and experiences of applying to and taking part in the PTAT, particularly in the Province of Alberta. This paper contributes to the literature by presenting results from a study that used a focused ethnographic approach and methods of PhotoVoice and qualitative semi-structured interviews to engage with nine Mexican workers who are or have worked in Alberta.

By learning about workers' experiences, international labour policies and programs can be improved to better meet workers' needs (Weiler & McLaughlin, 2019).

Participants of this research identified that one of the most significant challenges to enrolling in the program is the lack of clear information and support by Mexican government agencies for navigating through the application process and meeting all the requirements.

Participants also spoke about the difficulties and costs associated with travelling between the rural communities where they live and the government offices in Mexico, due to the limited hours of operations and the lack of public transportation in rural areas.

Participants also revealed difficulties they face during their work season on farms and in other agriculture businesses in Alberta, including long work days and weeks, crowded living conditions, and limited access to transportation for shopping and off-farm socializing as a result of the high level of dependence on their employers. The findings highlight the need for better integration of workers, particularly in regions like Alberta where, according to research participants, distances are more considerable than in other provinces, limiting their opportunities to experience Canada beyond the farm.

The required end of season evaluation by their employers entrenches the power imbalance (Caxaj & Cohen, 2019) and acts as a control mechanism such that workers feel compelled to comply with the employer's demands without complaint, which translates, in some situations, into exploitation. They are reluctant to report their concerns to the Mexican authorities at the Consulate in Calgary as they don't want to be seen as trouble makers for fear they won't be rehired the following season. Furthermore, they believe that they won't be adequately responded to or supported by Mexican government representatives, similar to Encalada's

findings (2019). As such, the workers in this study expressed a lack of agency for improving their working conditions.

My research supports Ensalada's (2022) findings that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the challenges Mexican farm workers face in applying for and participating in the program, including increased costs and reduced pay. During the first stage of the pandemic, participants spoke about the Canadian government's requirement for them to quarantine for two weeks upon arrival to Canada, during which they received limited pay. Participants also spoke about the lack of or limited measures put in place by the employers to safeguard the workers' health, and the need to improve upon this.

Despite the difficulties, participants were unanimous in their assessment that participating in the PTAT offers better economic opportunities than what is available to them in Mexico. In addition, workers also talked about other benefits of working in Canada, as opposed to crossing and working illegally in the United States, such as a formal work visa and the seasonality of the work. When asked their perspectives on their role in Canada's food system, they said they were proud of the contributions they make but they feel they are regarded as a cheap labour force by their employers and the government.

The findings of this study emphasize the need to provide clear information to the migrant workers, both in Mexico and in Canada. It is also crucial that institutions in charge of monitoring workers' conditions and protection have better mechanisms to ensure workers' health and safety, and overall wellbeing. The study also highlights the need to address the power imbalances that contribute to the precarious and vulnerable position of foreign seasonal agriculture workers. Lastly, this research contributes to an understanding of Mexican workers' perspectives on the

challenges and benefits of participating in the PTAT, specifically within Alberta, which has received less attention than other provinces.

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Chapter Three: “My Body is in Canada, but my Heart Remains in Mexico”: Mexican Seasonal Farm Workers’ Perspectives on Well-being

Abstract

Reliance on foreign agricultural labourers is rapidly increasing in Canada. The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) is the major federal program coordinating these placements and Mexico, which runs the matching *Programa de Trabajadores Agrícolas Temporales* (PTAT), is the leading partner country, currently accounting for 43.8% of migrant farm workers in Canada. With the growing reliance on migrant workers there are increasing concerns about their living and working conditions, and calls for program and policy changes to better serve their needs and rights. According to Loo (2014), listening to and understanding workers' perspectives is critical to creating effective reforms. Our research aligns with this perspective. Through a focused ethnography approach, we engaged with nine Mexican seasonal farm workers who have the experience of participating in the PTAT in the Province of Alberta, where there have been few such participatory studies conducted. Using a food justice theoretical lens, qualitative data were gathered through PhotoVoice and semi-structured interviews to explore the factors influencing the health and well-being of nine Mexican farm labourers who are or have worked in Alberta through the PTAT. Participants also provided insights into what it meant to work and live as migrant labourers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Life as *divididos*, a word in Spanish that means divided, captures their sentiments about life as foreign temporary workers. This research gives voice to these individuals' experiences and needs, and as such provides insights on ways to improve their living and working conditions.

Keywords: Mexican Seasonal Agriculture Workers; Health and Well-Being; Food Justice; Alberta; Canada

3.1 Introduction

Globalization has and continues to transform the food system in Canada and around the world, leading to the reconfiguration of traditional production and distribution systems (Blessing et al., 2017). A consequence has been the domination and integration of transnational companies in the food sector, as well as changes in the range of products available to consumers, technological advances, distribution patterns, and labour migration (Qualman et al., 2018; Kennedy et al., 2004). But the impacts of globalization on the food industry and farming communities have varied, particularly between the Global South and the Global North (Kahler, 2004).

In Canada, since the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement in the early 1990s, governments have developed and promoted policies to expand agri-food exports through increased productivity (Qualman et al., 2018). Increasing output and efficiency of production in an increasing competitive global marketplace has led farmers to become more reliant on external inputs, such as agrochemicals and high-tech equipment. In order to offset the rising cost of inputs, farmers have adopted an economies of scale approach, particularly in the Canadian Prairie Region where specialized grain and livestock operations are predominant. As farm size has increased, the number of farms and farmers has declined (Statistics Canada, date).

In response to long-term labour shortages in the agriculture sector, in 1966 Canada created the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) (Verma, 2003). SAWP, a stream of Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFW), was initially established as a binational agreement with Jamaica, and later included Mexico (1974) and other Caribbean countries. Mexico, which runs the matching *Programa de Trabajadores Agrícolas Temporales* (PTAT),

currently accounts for 43.8% of the seasonal farm workers participating in the agriculture sector of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Over the past three decades, as Canada has become increasingly dependent on migrant labourers in the agriculture sector (Molnar, 2018; Weiler & McLaughlin, 2019), there are growing concerns about their work and living conditions, and overall wellbeing. Previous research has shown that workers' conditions some times violate what is established in their contracts, resulting in negative impacts on their physical and mental health (Beaumont, 2021; Binford, 2013; Foster, 2013; Otero & Preibisch, 2014; Salami et al., 2015; Weiler & McLaughlin, 2019; Worswick, 2010). Understanding the experiences of these workers can inform policy reforms that better serve their needs (Loo, 2014; Weiler & McLaughlin, 2019).

Most of the research on migrant agriculture workers to date has focused on the provinces of Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec, which have the highest provincial numbers; comparatively, there has been little research on this topic conducted in Alberta, particularly with Mexican migrant workers, despite rising numbers (Beaumont, 2021; Encalada, 2019; Weiler et al., 2020). In 2022, there were 1266 Mexican participating in PTAT and it is anticipated that by 2029 there will be a total of 19,600 positions available (Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council, n.d.). Engaging workers of PTAT in research is challenging because of language barriers, insufficient time due to the working schedules, lack of transportation to go outside the farms, lack of space and privacy, and the high degree of employers' control over workers' interactions. Nevertheless, listening to and documenting foreign workers' perspectives is crucial because of their increasingly prevalent role in Canadian agriculture

This qualitative research uses a focused ethnographic approach to explore the experiences of nine participants of PTAT who have worked or are currently working in Alberta, and the

impacts on their health and overall well-being during their stay in the province. This research was informed by a food justice theoretical framework. Food justice is a concept that challenges hegemonic structures and processes that create power imbalances in order to build a "...more just, and sustainable way for food to be grown, produced, made accessible, and eaten" (Gobbliet et al., 2010, p. 223). The quest for structural change in the food system through the lens of food justice has several angles; in this research, the situation of foreign farm workers within the Canadian context is examined because of their essential, yet precarious and vulnerable role in the food system (Hochedez, 2021).

The remainder of this article begins with literature review in which I introduce the concepts of well-being and food justice, and how these can be understood and applied with respect to the rights of migrant farm workers. In the methodology and methods section that follows I provide details about the approach utilized, data collection and analysis. Key themes identified in the data are presented and described in the findings section. In the discussion section, my results are analyzed in comparison to previous findings presented in the literature. The paper ends with a summary and concluding remarks.

3.2 Literature Review

3.2.1 Definition of Well-being

Well-being is defined by the Government of Canada as:

The presence of the highest possible quality of life in its full breath of expression focused on but not necessarily exclusive to: good living standards, robust health, a sustainable environment, vital communities, an educated populace, balanced time use, high levels of democratic participation, and access to and participation in leisure and culture. (Canadian Well-Being Index, 2012)

Elements of this definition align with what Encalada (2019) and Salami (2015) have identify as key factors influencing the well-being of seasonal farm workers: work and living conditions; access to health and other social services; and, cultural integration (Encalada, 2019; Salami, 2015). But research within the Canadian context shows that workers not only face barriers and challenges in accessing services and integrating into Canadian society, but also can work and live in adverse conditions. Otero and Preibisch (2014) underline the importance of safeguarding the integrity of workers' rights, as outlined in labour contracts, and to broadly think about their physical and emotional well-being.

3.2.2 Food Justice

To further frame the analysis of migrant workers' well-being, my research was informed by a food justice theoretical lens. I utilize the definition provided by Gobbliet et al., (2010): food justice is a concept that refers to “equity and fairness in relation to food system impacts and a different, more just, and sustainable way for food to be grown, produced, made accessible, and eaten” (p. 223). Moreover, I focus on the aspect of employment injustices in the agri-food system as a consequence of agricultural capitalism, as described by Hochedez (2021), which is directly relevant to my study of migrant Mexican farm labourers.

Gobbliet et al. (2010) conceptualize food justice as a term of multiple interpretations which encompass all aspects of “where, what, and how food is grown, produced, transported, accessed, and eaten” (p.5). According to Gobbliet et al. there are three main dimensions from which food justice can be approached:

- (i) seeking to challenge and restructure the dominant food system, (ii) providing a core focus on equity and disparities and the struggles by those who are most vulnerable, and (iii) establishing linkages and common goals with other forms of social justice

activism and advocacy—whether immigrant rights, worker justice, transportation and access, or land use. (Gobbliet et al. 2010, p. ix)

Food justice also presents a way to link and to interconnect all the elements involved within the food system. Fundamentally, it places migrant farmers, farmworkers, local and rural farmers and residents, as well as workers in food processing and distribution enterprises at the core of discussions about how food is currently produced and distributed, and it also analyzes how and which practices need to be transformed (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010). Most notably, this transformation aims to include changes in the laws, regulations, institutions, and cultural beliefs that perpetuate injustices in a system that prioritizes economic gain over people's well-being (Nyéléni, 2015).

Food justice also aligns with the United Nations' sustainable development goals in which the alleviation of hunger and economic and social welfare is guaranteed to *all* those involved in the food chain (FAO, 2021). More specifically, one of social sustainability pillars in food systems (Ross, 2018) calls for fair and equitable conditions for agricultural workers in order to attain a dignified and secure life (EOS, 2020). A food justice framework aims to ensure that farm workers and immigrant farmers are the center of discussions about how food should be produced and how these practices need to shift (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010).

3.2.3 Food Justice and Migrant Agricultural Labour

Due to ongoing labour shortages, Canada's agri-food system is increasingly reliant upon migrant labourers (Caxaj & Cohen, 2019; Haley et al., 2020; Weiler & McLaughlin, 2017). To address the labour shortages in agriculture, the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) was created in 1966 as a binational agreement with Jamaica. Mexico became a partnering country in 1974 and runs the matching *Programa de Trabajadores Agrícolas Temporales* (PTAT).

Participants in PTAT can work in Canada's agricultural sector for up to 8 months per year. In 2022, 25,669 Mexican workers were in Canada under the PTAT program, which represents the highest percentage (43.8 %) of all foreign agriculture labourers in the country (SERE, 2022).

Framed under the perspective of food justice and the equity and inclusion discourse that the Canadian Government promotes (Marsden, 2019; Perry, 2012), migrant farm workers not only have the right to fair conditions of work but also to have access to spaces where they can develop their life and build social bonds and experience cultural exchange (Weiler et al., 2016). The reality, however, tends to be the contrary. Research has exposed that migrant farm workers find themselves in vulnerable conditions both in Canada and their home country. Many workers migrate in search of a better life, trying to scape precarious context such as poverty and insecurity (Binford, 2013; Salami et al., 2015; Weiler et al., 2016). Some authors go so far as to state that these workers are caught in a modern version of slavery (Hochedez, 2021; Cohen, 2017).

Flocks et al. (2002) presents an study about the physical demands of work on the land, which compared to other jobs, poses a higher risk of health complications such as musculoskeletal injuries, respiratory system problems due to exposure to chemicals, dust, and other organic material commonly used in farming, and risk of developing cancer due to the exposure to carcinogenic substances such as pesticides. In addition, there is also mental and emotional burnout (Caxaj, S. & Cohen, 2019; Encalada, 2019; Salami, 2015). Because most workers have their rest area in the same place they work, it is difficult for them to disconnect, and both the public and private areas of workers' lives are regulated by their employers (Perry, 2012). By not having access to vehicles, and with language barriers, workers must rely on their employers' time, resources, and willingness for basic things, such as buying groceries (Binford,

2013). Encalada (2019) provides an example in Ontario, where she describes the situation of female migrant farm workers who are under constant monitoring, both in the work area and in their dorms. If a woman gets pregnant during the working season, she is immediately sent back home.

Arturo Almanza, a farm worker in Ontario, talks about solitude as one of the hardest aspects workers bear (La Grassa, 2021). Most of the workers migrate to Canada out of economic necessity, leaving their families for long periods of time. Emotionally, this creates deep discomfort and pain. Having limited access to the local community and lacking opportunities for social integration increases feelings of loneliness (Encalada, 2019; Foster, 2013). As Foster (2013) expresses in his article “Temporary Foreign Workers: Issues in Integration and Inclusion”, migrant workers are generally excluded from community life and there are no policies that address this situation. He refers to foreign workers as a “shadow population” living in Canada for a considerable time on a yearly basis, but are not included in the official number of residents, nor are they able to access the same services or develop their life as other residents (Foster, 2013). In relation to this, Koc and Welsh (2001) add the following:

The feelings of belonging or the identification with the recipient society cannot be fulfilled without a complete integration (the ability of an individual or social group to use and contribute in all dimensions of the economic activity, social, cultural, and political in the society, without systemic barriers). For this reason, food security, as other fundamental rights, needs to be conceived as a relevant analytical tool to evaluate how the migrants perceive their inclusion, how they rebuilt their identity, and how they integrate successfully. (p.4)

Seasonal farm workers are often unable to participate in the communities in which they are situated due to long working days and language barriers, but can also be explained through what Encalada (2019) writes about migrant workers being seen as a “just-in-time” solution, where there is no real interest to integrate them into society. Salami et al. (2015) adds that they are seen as disposable workforce whose main function and value are understood in terms of the work they perform. The temporality of their stay not only allows employers to have a source of workers at their convenience but also allows them to have a form of control over them.

Given the precariousness of their employment, migrant workers tend to remain compliant and are therefore easy to exploit. The repercussions of this exploitation on migrant workers are significant and diverse. Negative impacts on their health are frequently experienced and are aggravated by not having adequate access to the health system. Salami et al. (2015; 2016) describes the poor housing conditions, lack of sanitary facilities, language barriers, and mobility limitations, as the main reasons why they encounter constant health issues. The COVID-19 pandemic only aggravated the situation (Haley et al., 2020). Amidst the Canadian restrictions, farm workers had to sort out different requirements to enter the program during the pandemic; in many cases this meant an increase in costs. It also affected their health and safety due to crowded and inadequate working and living conditions, as exemplified by the death of farmworkers in one of Ontario’s greenhouses as a result of unsafe conditions (Gamble, 2021). If the fear of being deported is added, the experience becomes highly stressful. Workers are constantly anxious about committing errors or not pleasing their employers, so they push their bodies and mental health to their limits (Salami, 2015).

When workers enroll in the temporary programs, they are assured that their rights will be protected and that there will be authorities from their countries attentive to any needs they may

have; but in reality, this is usually not the case. Most workers have reported a lack of adequate and timely responses when reaching out to some authorities. The labour conditions of SAWP workers pose significant barriers to their rights. Workers under this stream cannot renounce and look for another job as they must remain with their employer for the duration of their contract, which can lead to exploitative and abusive working conditions. In addition, workers fail to report the lack of proper measures and safety measures because they fear their employers' retaliation if they find out workers called the authorities (Caxaj & Cohen, 2019; Binford, 2013; Perry, 2012).

There is growing recognition of the need to develop a more socially just food system that improves the working and living conditions of migrant farm labourers (e.g., Caxaj & Cohen, 2019, 2020; Perry, 2018; Weiler et al., 2015). Organizations such as The Migrant Worker Health Project, MAWC Farm Workers, and Justicia for Migrant Workers promote network creation between institutions and NGOs to bridge services for temporary labourers, including seasonal agricultural workers. These and other organizations facilitate migrant workers' participation in different spaces, enabling them to share their knowledge and experiences, as well as access information and counsel so they can negotiate better conditions with their employers. From a food justice lens, these actions are a form of resistance to the hegemonic view that shapes the food system in Canada. Through the food justice movement, grass-root organizations and academic research, there are people documenting these experiences and supporting workers searching for a place to recreate themselves (Perry, 2018).

3.3 Methodology and Methods

In this research I selected a focused ethnographic approach to learn about the lived experiences of Mexican migrant farm labourers in Alberta and the impacts on their health and

well-being. I utilized a qualitative and participatory methodology, and methods of PhotoVoice and semi-structured interviews. Recruitment involved a combination of approaches. One approach was through my practicum with the Mexican Consulate¹⁷, as this gave me direct contact with the workers. As part of my practicum, I welcomed workers at Edmonton's airport and gave them information about how to contact the Consulate in case of need. At that time, I took the opportunity to introduce myself as an international graduate student from Puebla, Mexico and explained my research to them. Although I met approximately a hundred Mexican farm workers this way, only five agreed to participate because of the fear of reprisals for speaking with me. Of those agreeing to take part, I also asked for referrals to other potential participants, which led to one more recruit. I also made a post on Facebook and this yielded another participant. Finally, I randomly met two more individuals casually at a grocery store. In total, nine migrant workers agreed to take part in this research, which was conducted from April to August 2022. All the interviewees were male. Attempts to include female migrant workers were unsuccessful. This is likely due to the fact that there is only a small percentage of women in the PTAT and they are usually under stricter surveillance by their employers (Spitzer, 2022; Encalada, 2019).

Prior to the interviews, participants were asked to take photos of different aspects of their living and working conditions, which were discussed at the beginning of the interviews. A pre-formed question guide was used to structure the remainder of the interview, but interviewees were encouraged to comment on any other topics they felt were relevant. Only two interviews

¹⁷ The practicum was a requirement for my Master's Program in Arts and Community Engagement at the University of Alberta. It was completed from August 2021 to April 2022.

were conducted in person, the remainder were conducted by cellphone. Interviews were conducted in Spanish and ranged from 40 to 80 minutes in length; all were digitally recorded.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, translated into English and analyzed through content analysis. Initial categories were created based on the available literature on migrant farm labourers, followed by the addition and refinement of categories or themes based on the PhotoVoice and interview data.

3.4 Findings

The findings and analysis presented in this section are derived from interviews conducted with Mexican migrant agriculture workers who are or have participated in the PTAT program in the Province of Alberta. Their stories about their life in Alberta, as well as back in Mexico, provide a glimpse of their lived realities, which remain largely unknown to the Canadian public despite their crucial role in our agri-food system.

3.4.1 Participant's Profile

Nine people from Mexico took part in this research. All participants had previous experience, knowledge and skills in agriculture, which is a requirement of the PTAT. At the time of this research, six interviewees were working in Alberta, one participant was working in British Columbia but had previously worked in Alberta, and two were former participants of the program but are now working in other sectors. Besides working in Alberta, participants mentioned having worked in Manitoba, British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia.

Participants' ages ranged between 30 and 55, with the majority being 40 – 45 years of age. Enrolment in PTAT requires applicants to be between 25 – 45 years old, but older workers who have been in the program can continue to receive contracts. Participants had between five to seven years of participation in the program. Six of the nine interviewees worked in honey

production, one worked specifically with tuber crops while another worked on a farm with the production of other vegetables, and one last worker is in silviculture. For further details on participants' profiles and work experiences, see Table 1 below.

Table 2.

Participants profile and work experiences

Participants	Age	Years in the program	Experiences in PTAT in other Provinces	Currently working in Alberta	Current farm work	Work experience in another agricultural sector
1	30-35 years	< 5	Yes	No	Diversity of Vegetables	Yes
2	40-45 years	> 10	No	Yes	Former farm workers with bees	Yes
3	40-45 years	> 5	No	Yes	Former farm workers with bees	Yes
4	45-50 years	> 10	Yes	Yes	Bees/Honey	No
5	50-55 years	< 10	Yes	Yes	Tubers	Yes
6	45-50 years	> 5	Yes	Yes	Bees/Honey	Yes
7	45-50 years	> 10	No	Yes	Bees/Honey	Yes
8	45-50 years	< 10	Yes	Yes	Bees/Honey	Yes
9	35-40 years	< 5	Yes	Yes	Silviculture	Yes



Figure 3. Participant's co-workers at a honey farm

Daily Work and Life at the Farms

The nine research participants had the experience of arriving during the cold winter months (February – March), and also leaving during the onset of fall and winter (October - December). A maximum of eight-month work contracts is permitted for seasonal workers but the length of their individual contracts depends on their employer and the work demands. All participants agreed that their work and life schedules, although somewhat variable depending on the nature of their work and their employer, formed a weekly routine. From Monday to Saturday, work typically started between 7 and 8am. Their contracts stipulate that the working day is eight hours, but according to participants, it can be as long as 10 to 14 hours as there may be jobs that need to be finished once started. It is expected that workers are paid for the extra hours they work, but two participants said that sometimes overtime is compensated in other ways, such as having extra free time in a day when there is not much work. After they finish a working day,

participants commented that they prepare dinner, eat, do household chores, call their families in Mexico, and, "sleep as much as you can" to prepare for the next day. Sundays are the only day off and this is when they usually prepare meals for the week ahead and tend to other domestic chores. Depending on the work or employer schedule, the weekly routine may vary. There may be recreational opportunities on Sundays as well, such as playing sports and visiting with other workers. This pattern is repeated throughout their work season.

Language barriers are also important in workers' experiences; they are accepted in the program without needing English language skills. On the farms, one of the Mexican workers usually acts as the translator between the workers and the employer. However, the inability to speak English creates challenges when they want to access different services. Consequently, they need to ask the person acting as a translator or the employer for help. This limitation also extends to social interactions.

The Physical Experience

For participants, their body is their primary instrument; as such, part of their work experience is influenced by their physical capacity, the weather extremes, and their attitude. Coming from Mexico, the hot weather they experience in Alberta during the summer months is not unusual or difficult; it is the cold and the snow that make an impression on them. For example, one worker commented: "Well, me, I do like the cold, besides, here [where he is originally from] we don't have snow (...)" (Participant 1).

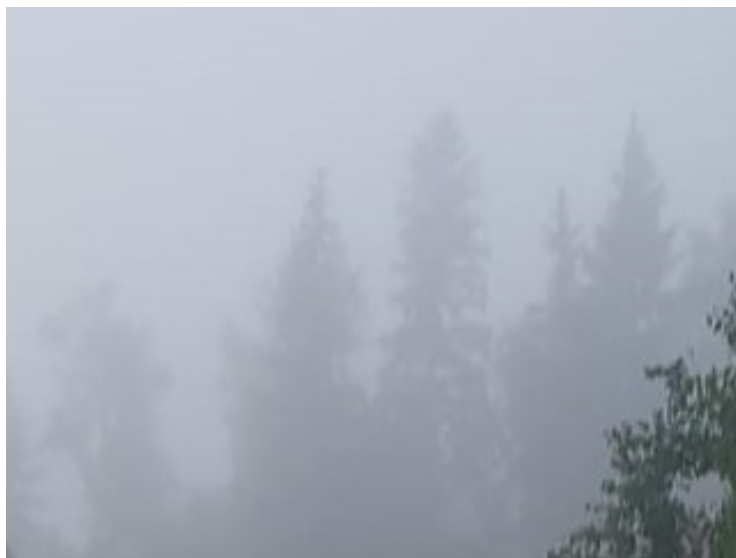


Figure 4. Participant's morning view from his work place

Another worker humorously compared himself and his work outdoors in the winter to a sled dog:

“That is when you pull those carts... over the snow you go pulling... as if you were a dog.”

(Participant 3)



Figure 5. Participant shows the marks of the vehicle in snow leading to where he works

The physical nature of much of the work is demanding and participants' perception is that younger applicants are typically selected first because of this. Aging and not being able to carry out tasks is something that participants worried about. One participant reflected on his experience with the aging process:

When I arrived, I was young. Then, I used to make fun of the elders. They used to tell me “really are you going for a run?”, because I have always liked running. Right now, I gained some weight, but before I used to play basketball a lot, I was fit, I ran. Then I used to tell the elders, “Really? Are you tired already? And now, I am in their place, and I think, yes, my mom was right, it is really exhausting to live the life like this. (Participant 8)

There are exceptions, however, as one participant commented: “Well at that time [of being selected], I wasn't young, so I was lucky to enter the program”. (Participant 6)

At the end of each season, workers receive an evaluation from their employer. A bad evaluation is poorly regarded by the Mexican authorities and could jeopardize their work at the farm next season, and their continuation in the program. Because workers want to secure a position for the following season, they tend to push their bodies to the limits in order to achieve a high level of performance and have their work noticed by the employer.

3.4.2 Access to Health Care

Having and maintaining good health is a main concern for the workers. They worry that if they get sick or injured, the employer won't hire them again. Consequently, workers try to stay healthy and avoid injuries. If they present minor symptoms like stomach problems, colds, or a fever, they will self-administer medicine they've brought from Mexico. A participant explains:

I try to bring things from Mexico. For example, here I have some medicines like Naproxeno for the headaches, or Terramicina. I go to the medical center of the town and I tell the doctor, “if I have stomach problems, can you give me something?” And he gives me medicine. (Participant 4)

Another participant spoke about avoiding informing his employer about an illness and dealing with it on his own, unless in an extreme situation, because of the reaction he would receive.

...because sometimes it is scary to tell the patrón: “I have headache, or I have stomach pain”. He will tell you “No, just because of a pain in the stomach?” To avoid that situation, you take your Terramicina and you have your first-aid kit, and you bring it with you in the lunch box in case any situation happens. (Participant 4)

On the other hand, a participant recalled with gratitude his previous employer's caring attitude, pointing out that not all are as compassionate:

Well here, in any situation we have or any illness, I tell the patrón [employer], and he takes us to the doctor. If we don't have pills he gives us a pill, or if it is something serious the patrón takes us [to the doctor]. But every farm is different. (Participant 5)

Accessing health services, such as calling 911 for an ambulance, is also complicated because of language barriers, as Participant 9 explains:

Unfortunately, the language sometimes limits that. You have to go to the patrón, so he takes you to the hospital, and he acts as an intermediary. I think [there should be] a translator at the hospital, why? Because the demand is a lot, we are already thousands of foreign workers in Canada without the language. If the government is accepting you as a worker, I think that it is the Canadian government's responsibility to provide a translator in the hospital, at least for an emergency.

3.4.3 Food Access

When participants were asked about how they access food, they spoke about going once a week to shop in the nearest city or town, depending on the location of the farm. They usually buy groceries on Fridays or Sundays but this depends on the employer availability and the work demands. Participants said they buy meat, vegetables and fruits, and different Mexican products when they find them. According to the participants, even in some small towns, it's possible to find places where they sell familiar and culturally appropriate foods. For Mexican, tortillas are a fundamental food item and when they can't buy them prepared they will make them. A few participants commented that they bring cooking ingredients, such as spices, from home. All the interviewees said they are responsible for cooking their own meals and while Sunday is often the day they prepare meals for the week ahead, they may also cook on one or two other days, including preparing snacks for mid-day breaks. Some employers provide food for the workers on special occasions but it is not customary.

An important aspect that affects workers' access to food is the employer's attitude towards the use of vehicles. Some workers said that their employer will lend them a vehicle to use for shopping, while others said that only the employer or someone they hire will drive the workers to grocery stores. One worker complained about the dependency on his employer:

The employer has the obligation to facilitate transportation to do our shopping. But, the employer does what is convenient for him. He takes you to the nearest town. We have struggled a lot in that aspect, because we have told him that it is more convenient for us to go to Edmonton, even if it is only once every 15 days. Why? Because there are many more Mexican products and because the products are cheaper. But our employer says that it represents more expenses for him. He has to buy more gas, he needs to pay a driver,

and it is not easy for him. So, he takes us to the nearest town, even if that means we have to buy the products at a higher price. (Participant 9)

The primary objective of participating in PTAT is to save as much money as possible; hence, the workers look for low cost products and mostly prepare their own food from scratch. Only when they go out to buy groceries they might buy pizza, hamburgers, hotdogs or Chinese food. Eating at Chinese buffets was mentioned by several interviewees; similar to Mexican food, it has a lot of flavor and integrates different meats and vegetables.

Participants' opportunities to take part in family or community gatherings were rare; the exception tends to be at the end of each working season when employers offer a meal to thank them for their work. On occasion, some employers' family members participate. Of the nine participants, only one talked about his previous employer organizing several meals where his family was present.

3.4.4 Perceptions of Well-Being

All the participants referred to well-being as the feeling of being at ease or having a sense of peace which encompasses different aspects of their life, including the personal sphere represented by the family, their financial situation, and a positive situation in the workplace.

Families were identified as top of mind by participants, and they expressed the importance of putting their loved ones' well-being first. Concern for their families' welfare is the main motivation behind participants' enrolling in PTAT and working outside their country. In order to support their families financially, all participants are willing to live, in their words, "*divididos*" [divided] between the two countries:

For me, well-being depends on several factors, that we, as migrants can't have together.

Because, well-being, as I understand it, is having the family and work aspects [come]

together. If you cannot have those two fundamental aspects in your life [together], then you don't have well-being. [If] I have my family, a good job, [good] income, [if] my children are studying, then I have well-being. But as migrants we can't have well-being entirely. We are divided. (Participant 9)

Participant 3 spoke about the negative consequences for his marriage and his well-being:

The program provides work, better income, but well-being from my point of view? Not necessarily, right? For example, in my case, it didn't give me well-being because I got divorced. So, there are perks and negative things. (Participant 3)

With the income earned, workers can improve their situation and increase their family members' possibilities to have what they believe is a better life: "Coming here to Canada has changed my life completely. Because when I started, I didn't have anything, so coming here changed my life, economically, for my kids and my wife" (Participant 5).

Their work environment is also considered important to their well-being. Three workers specified that relations in the work space, such as solidarity, cooperation and teamwork, are essential for their well-being. Another related theme that came to light is workers' feeling of well-being when their work is recognized and appreciated by the employer. A participant recalled:

The day I was preparing divisions [dividing a bee hive into a new colony] with the boss [foreman]. I was doing one side [without the foreman's supervision] and he was doing the other side. The patrón [employer] asked the boss, "why is this lad working alone?" and the foreman answered him, "because he knows what he is doing". "But you should supervise him". ...And he responded to the patrón, "he knows what he is doing". Then

the patrón said “well, if you say that it is fine”. I felt they recognized my work.

(Participant 2)

In the program, workers' performance is evaluated at the end of each season, which influences if they are rehired. Recognition also provides a sense of security although is not guarantee that they are going to be rehired.

Housing is another sphere that has gained a lot of attention from researchers and the media due to the impacts on workers' mental and physical health (Salami et al., 2015; Haley et al., 2020). Three of the nine participants commented that they felt their living conditions were adequate and comfortable, and specifically referred to not feeling crowded. This was not the case for another participant who shared: “We don't have the possibility to cook every day because we don't have space or time. We are living more than 10 in a house and we only have few stoves to cook, so unfortunately you don't cook every day” (Participant 9).



Figure 6. Participant's house during his stay in Alberta.

Emotional and Mental Aspects: Loneliness and Anxiety

Participants talked about feeling lonely in their life divided between Mexico and Canada. One participant explains: “You can talk to your family over the phone, with a video call, but you are alone” (Participant 2). In addition to loneliness, participants said that they can experience a high level of stress, depending on their work and living situations. But they tend to keep negative emotions such as loneliness and anxiety hidden from their families instead of worrying them, which increases the emotional strain. To deal with this, some workers focus even more on their jobs, while others will make a point of visiting other co-workers during the weekends if possible.

The attitude of employers towards the workers significantly influences their emotional and mental state. Workers who reported feelings of anxiety said it was because they felt they needed to be constantly on the alert to protect their position on the farm. The situation can be further aggravated, either because of a tense environment with co-workers or the boss, inappropriate housing conditions, or lack of services such as internet to communicate with the family. All these factors can influence and result in stress. On the other hand, when an employer is supportive, even when the workers still miss their family, it increases their sense of well-being and overall satisfaction with their job. One of the nine workers, for example, spoke about how much he enjoys the environment at the farm he is working on, and how he would like to share this experience with his family.

Participants said that they feel that their reality of working on farms in Canada is of no interest to the general public or to the authorities. One participant expressed his appreciation for being able to tell his story by being included in this research: “Well, thank you. Because never in my life before, while I have been here, there was something like this. Never have we talked to another [external] person [about our situations]” (Participant 8).

3.4.5 Workers' Cultural Integration

“Here you don't have a life because you are just dedicated to work – a modern slave”.

(Participant 2)

When participants in this research were asked if they have opportunities for connecting and integrating into the local community, all commented that due to a lack of free time and access to transportation the opportunities were limited. Participant 4 said:

Well, we don't have time. We work from Monday to Saturday, and, sometimes during the harvest you can be heading back at 9 or 8 pm. Then Sunday, your day to rest, is the only day we have to do the laundry, clean the house and those things. Then, the only thing you [could] do, is going to another “traila” [trailer] to chat with another co-worker.

When asked if there were any recreational activities they took part in, some mentioned doing some physical activities, such as playing football, doing some exercises or going for a bike ride, while others said they would organize a meal and get together with other workers. But mostly participants said Sundays were spent doing domestic chores, resting and catching up on sleep.

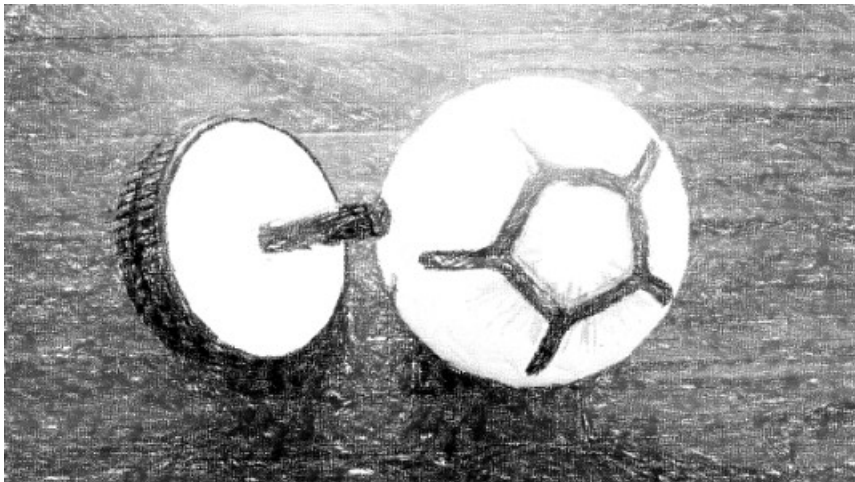


Figure 7. Participant's recreation and exercise items

One participant, who had an overall more positive experience on the farm he worked on compared to the rest of the workers, told about a social activity organized by his employer:

That day the patrón invited us to his place, to a barbecue with his family – his parents, his wife, his children - and us workers. He invited us and opened the door of his house. Such a thing hardly ever happens for us in Canada. He [the employer] used to tell us, “You are part of my family, you work for me, you are my friends, you are my family”. (Participant 1)



Figure 8. Participant at a barbecue organized by the employer

Participants were asked what impact they felt they had on Canadian society. Some said that beyond their labour they would like to share more of Mexican culture but time constraints and language barriers made this difficult. Participant 3 explained why Mexicans workers and he, in particular, have had a positive impact in Canada:

We create a positive impact in general, in the economy, in culture too, because we are friendlier people, warmer, more loving. For example, I know a lady from church. She feels completely lonely here. In this culture children live very independently, away from their parents and elders. Not like us Mexicans; we embrace our parents, our grandparents. This lady was very depressed. She really wanted to visit Mexico and she went to visit my relatives. I told them “please welcome this person, she is a good person”. She was there for a whole month and everyone was really happy. Then, in that sense, I did impact a person in a positive way.

Some participants compared their lived experiences on Alberta farms with other provinces they had worked in. Some felt they had more opportunities to spend time with people and do things outside their workplace:

“Where I was in Manitoba, you had a car and you could go to town [more freely]. Here, it is one time per week. On the coast [British Columbia], they used to give you a bicycle and you could ride your bicycle and go and come as you wanted. It is different here”.

(Participant 8)

3.5 Discussion

Concerns about the living and working conditions of migrant farm workers in Canada have been brought to light by previous research mostly conducted in other provinces; in British Columbia, Caxaj and Cohen (2019) expose the negative impacts on workers' health due to the lack of safety measures and efficient authorities responses. In Ontario, Encalada (2019) presents the levels of control most farm workers experience at the farms, especially women, and in Quebec, Champagne (2022) shared the experience of a Mexican farm worker's health consequences of the lack of proper safety equipment. My research uses a focused ethnographic approach to expand

upon the existing literature by exploring the experiences of Mexican seasonal farm workers' experiences while working on farms in Alberta. Through this approach, I was able to listen to workers' perspectives and gain insights about the advantages and challenges of participating in the PTAT within this provincial context, and the effects on their overall health and well-being. Although many of my findings align with those of previous research, my study also reveals issues unique to Alberta and the COVID-19 pandemic. In the following section, I draw comparisons between my findings and those discussed in the literature.

Perceptions of Well-being

According to the participants of this research, well-being is linked to having basic needs (physical and mental health, housing, education) met for both themselves and their family. PTAT provides a salary that can help meet these basic needs and, hence, improves the quality of life for their families in Mexico. But being away from their families for long periods of time on a yearly basis erodes family life and therefore impacts their well-being. The majority of participants spoke about their life as *divididos* [divided], both geographically and emotionally. Despite gaining financially, this is the price they pay for being migrant labourers.

Well-being centres on eight aspects: good living standards, robust health, a sustainable environment, vital communities, education, work-life balance, democratic participation and access to and participation in leisure and culture (Canadian Well-Being Index, 2012). Yet many of these dimensions are inaccessible to seasonal foreign workers due to the work demands and the nature of their status in Canada. From a food justice perspective (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010) workers' perspectives should be central when analyzing international labour programs as they play a fundamental role in the food system and are deserving of having their needs and rights addressed. Denying them the same rights as other residents and workers goes against Canadian

discourse on inclusion and equity, and also undermines the government's accepted definition of well-being (CWI, n.d.). Seasonal farm workers not only find themselves in a vulnerable position in Canada, but in their home country as well. Many workers do not find economic alternatives to meet their family's needs in their home countries. In most cases this means limited access to health, education, housing, etc. (Weiler et al., 2017; Salami et al., 2015; Binford, 2013;).

Physical and Mental Health

Physical health is a fundamental dimension of well-being and is a key requirement for participating in the PTAT; without optimum health participants cannot perform the physically demanding work that is expected of them. Previous investigations have exposed conditions that put migrant workers' health at risk and the barriers to access to timely and appropriate medical services (Spitzer, 2022; Caxaj & Cohen, 2019; Salami et al., 2015). Participants of this research spoke about their dependence on the employer for accessing the Canadian health care system and their reluctance to do so for many health issues, instead self-diagnosing and relying on medications brought from Mexico. They expressed the need to improve upon the current situation in order improve access to health services and to safeguard workers' health, which was especially true during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, when the space in the provided housing was limited, it facilitated contagion among the workers and increased anxiety levels. In addition to the existing tension, the strict measures in the stores where the workers made their purchases, and with more significant restrictions to leave the farms, the participants expressed their profound desperation. Research participants concurred that with the Pandemic the limitation their commonly faced became even more challenging.

Besides the physical aspect, Salami et al. (2015) writes about the factors impacting the mental and emotional health of temporary migrant workers:

Maintaining mental health was a common challenge experienced by participants. One study identified nervous symptoms in migrant workers. Factors and conditions contributing to poor mental health were poor working conditions, poor working relations, communication barriers, loneliness, competition among colleagues, injustices and powerlessness, poor nutrition, insufficient sleep, stressful and unsafe working conditions, and abuse. (p. 548)

Many of these mental health stressors were also brought up by research participants. As Salami et al. (2015) state, participants felt lonely due to the lack of social interactions and stress due to the evaluation. Caxaj and Cohen (2019) also talk about the assessments workers receive, stating it acts as mechanism to increase their productivity. Comments from the workers interviewed in this research also align with these findings; they feel the need to constantly prove they are good at their job and worthy of rehiring. This can take a physical toll and can also cause high levels of stress and anxiety.

Access to Adequate and Culturally Appropriate Food

Food is essential to ensure the health of farm workers. Otherwise, inadequate nutrition can lead to deficiencies and negatively impact workers' health and well-being (Weiler et al., 2017). None of the research participants mentioned problems related to insufficient food or lack of knowledge of where to find it, but rather the limitations towards their employer. Spitzer (2022) also exposes the same situation; all did their grocery shopping and said they could find many culturally appropriate foods in local towns or nearby cities, but they depended on the employer's willingness to provide transportation to access food to a further location. Access to cooking facilities was also a limiting factor for some that lived in a house with several other workers. This is reiterated in Weiler et al. (2017) when workers' food security is discussed. It

also relates to what Hochedez (2021) states, about farm workers been in a vulnerable situation because of their high dependency on their employer's willingness to provide adequate living and working conditions. What participants expressed also relates to what Encalada (2019) exposes in Ontario, where farm workers possibilities to access services also depend on their employer.

Cultural Integration

Opportunities to participate in social activities with co-workers, the farm family or in nearby communities can also have an impact on the mental and emotional health of participants. However, as Foster (2013) explains, there are limited opportunities for temporary foreign farm workers to integrate into society. In part, this is due to daily and weekly work demands, but it is also due to the considerable distances between farms and from farm to urban centers in Alberta, which increases the difficulties of participating in social and community activities. Similar to Salami et al.'s (2015) findings, my research also identifies language barriers as being one of the biggest challenges to achieving social integration. In addition, Salami et al. (2016) also express that public services are not ready to receive foreign farm workers, which research participants confirmed. For instance, workers lack access to public transportation, which limits their mobility. They also face difficulties accessing services to assist them with tax filing, legal advice, and prompt and efficient banking services and cannot choose alternative housing options. These are just some examples. Furthermore, these challenges become greater in Alberta, where the considerable distances directly impact all areas of workers' lives.

3.6 Conclusions

Research on migrant farm labourers in Canada has identified numerous aspects of concern regarding their living and working conditions, and the impacts on their health and well-being. In my research, I focus on the under-researched context of Alberta and the lived

experiences of Mexican seasonal agricultural workers participating in the *Programa the Trabajadores Temporales Agrícolas* (PTAT). By employing a focused ethnographic approach and conducting qualitative participatory research methods of PhotoVoice and semi-structured interviews in Spanish, I was able to engage with nine Mexican seasonal agriculture workers to hear their perspectives on being part of the PTAT and the implications for their health and well-being. Despite recognition of the importance of hearing directly from foreign workers about their situations, there are several obstacles to achieving this, such as their fear of reprisal for speaking up, their busy work schedules, language barriers, and distance between farm sites.

I began my conversation with participants by discussing the photos that they took to visually represent their working and living situations on farms in Alberta. These images aided in my learning about their perceptions of well-being and the factors shaping their physical and mental health, which were further explored through the semi-structured interviews. In addition to the physical demands of the work, participants spoke about their lives as being fragmented, living in two realities, which takes a toll on their mental and emotional health. Even though are able to attain an income they could not achieve in Mexico, it comes at the cost of being separated from their families. Working in Alberta, the feeling of isolation can be quite prominent because of the distances between the farms and communities or cities. In addition to limiting opportunities for social integration, access to affordable and culturally appropriate food is also impacted by these distances and their high dependency on their employer for transportation. What becomes clear through these findings is that migrant workers are not able to achieve several dimensions of well-being, as presented by the Canadian Government's Index of Well-Being. When analyzed through a food justice lens, migrant farm workers should be central to discussions about equity and sustainability of the Canadian food system (Hochedez, 2021).

This investigation contributes to the literature on seasonal agriculture workers in Canada, specifically within the Alberta context. The extensive distances between farms and urban centers in the Province of Alberta significantly impact PTAT workers' working and living conditions. This situation requires additional attention and strategies to address workers' needs. Using a focused ethnographic and participatory approach also adds to the studies of food justice that emphasize the need to hear foreign farm workers' voices in order to create a fairer and more equitable food system. These research findings thus provide useful information for policymakers interested in improving labour programs in agriculture so as to better meet the needs of temporary workers by improving their overall working and living conditions. With continuing labour shortages in Canada's agriculture sector and the growing reliance upon foreign farm workers, it is imperative to create programs and conditions that uphold the rights of these individuals.

Securing participants who willing to take part in this research was difficult due to time and research funding constraints, as well as for the reasons outline above. In future research, including more participants from different types of farming operations in different regions of the province would be informative. I was unable to include female workers in this study and it is important to do so as their challenges and experiences may differ from male workers. Future research could also explore workers' strategies for coping with adversity, including establishing or connecting with supportive social networks.

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Chapter Four: Summary of the Findings and Conclusions

Mexican migrant agriculture workers who were enrolled in the *Programa de Trabajadores Agrícolas Temporales* (PTAT) were engaged in this research to learn about their experiences of applying for and participating in the program in the context of Alberta, where little research has been conducted with this particular population. More specifically, my research objectives were to learn about: 1) their motivations for enrolling in the PTAT; 2) the process of applying for and being selected to be part of PTAT; 3) benefits of their participation in the program; 4) challenges during their employment and stay in Alberta and the mechanisms they use to cope with those challenges; 5) their access to health services and nutritious and culturally appropriate food; and, 6) the extent to which they are able to experience Canadian culture and integrate into local communities.

I used a focused ethnographic approach to frame this qualitative and participatory research project. The PhotoVoice method was utilized so that participants could capture and share images with me that reflected their living and work experiences in Alberta. The photos were discussed during follow-up semi-structured interviews, during which I encouraged participants to raise any additional issues or themes relevant to them and the topic. The interviews were analyzed through content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018; Cáceres, 2003), which enabled the identification of themes and subthemes relevant to participants. In this concluding chapter, I present an overview and synthesis of the main findings from Chapters 2 and 3. Also included in this chapter are: the significance of the research; an assessment of food justice as a theoretical framework to analyze the experiences of PTAT workers; recommendations for future research; and final concluding remarks.

4.1 Overview of the Findings

Chapter 2 focuses on the process of applying for the PTAT in Mexico and the benefits and challenges of participating in the program in the Province of Alberta. A lack of adequate employment and income opportunities in Mexico is the main reason identified by the nine Mexican farm workers for applying to the program. Besides the economic opportunity available in Canada, the seasonality of the position, the assurance of having a job when they arrive in Canada, and the learning opportunities in agriculture production and processing are additional benefits associated with being part of the PTAT. In contrast to the benefits, participants also identified several challenges related to the application process in Mexico and how the program is structured and managed in Canada. There were additional difficulties they encountered both in Mexico, upon arrival to Canada and while working on the farms as a result of the restrictions and requirements imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the Canadian government declaring them as essential workers and thus being granted an exception for entry into the country, they still had to go into quarantine and received only partial pay during that time. On the farms, participants said that there was limited or a lack of safeguards put in place in the workplace and in their accommodations to protect their well-being. Additionally, there was no monitoring of this situation by representatives of the Mexican Consulate in Calgary responsible for overseeing the program in Alberta. A power imbalance between employers and workers was evident in their dependence on the employer for access to transportation for grocery shopping and medical services, and in the evaluation of their work performance that employers are required to complete at the end of the season. The evaluation is influential in determining whether they are hired again the next season and participants said that because of this they work hard to perform well during the long work days and weeks. This chapter ends by presenting

workers' perspectives on their role in the Canadian food system, emphasizing that although they recognize their work as crucial, it is not valued enough and they are seen as a disposable cheap labour force.

Chapter 3 focuses on participants' perspectives on the impacts of participating in the PTAT on their health and well-being, including their access to health and other services, and their participation and integration into the local community. These findings from PTAT workers in Alberta echo what authors like Caxaj and Cohen (2009) and Salami et al. (2015) have identified, such as: the physical toll of long working days and weeks, barriers to accessing health and other services, and the feelings of loneliness and anxiety associated with language barriers, the relative isolation on the farms, and the separation from their families for extended periods of time. Participants spoke about being divided physically and emotionally. Their lives are divided between two countries and while the program addresses their financial needs, this is only one part of what they need to fully experience well-being. The working conditions and isolation they face while working on farms in Alberta is distinct from some other provinces, due to size of the farming operations and the distance between farms in Alberta and surrounding towns and cities. This also impacts their access to food shopping and their opportunities to interact with people outside the farm.

The findings of this research suggest that while participation in the PTAT provides Mexican migrant agriculture workers with a preferable employment and income alternative to what is available to them in Mexico, the way the program is managed, both in Mexico and Canada, does not ensure workers' rights and needs are being met. In order to make appropriate changes to the program, it is imperative that the voices of Mexican farm workers participating in

this international labour program are heard and respected, as they are playing an increasingly critical role in Canada's food system.

4.2 Significance of the Research

Most migrant agriculture workers in Canada concentrate in the provinces of British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec; hence, most research on this topic has been conducted there. However, the number of foreign farm labourers has been rising in Alberta and it is expected that by 2029 there will be 19,600 vacant positions in agriculture that the local workforce cannot cover (Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council, n.d.). The purpose of my research was to engage with Mexican seasonal farm workers' participating in the PTAT in Alberta, in order to learn, first-hand, about their experiences of applying for and working in the agriculture sector within this provincial context. As a Mexican and fluent Spanish speaker, I was able to communicate with these migrant workers and achieve a level of trust that assured them that their narratives and images would be shared through this research but that anonymity would be guaranteed. My practicum at the Mexican Consulate in Calgary enabled me to meet with approximately 100 workers as they landed in Canada, but only five agreed to participate in the research. I used a variety of other methods to identify Mexican participants in the PTAT who were willing to take part in the research. Through these efforts, I was able to achieve a sample size of nine, but none of these were women. Overall, there are fewer women in the PTAT and as Encalada (2019) has written, female migrant workers are typically under more scrutiny than male workers by employers. Despite the difficulties in recruiting participants, research with Mexican migrant workers is important as Mexico contributes 43.8% of foreign farm workers in Canada's agricultural sector (Statistics Canada, 2022). Learning about these workers' perspectives can

help to inform policymakers about the experiences of a major part of this essential migrant workforce. Learning about Mexican seasonal farm workers' experiences can also contribute to analyzing and further improving other binational labour programs. By identifying similar elements and challenges, the efforts of different groups can intersect to promote change to better serve temporary and seasonal farm workers in Canada.

My research findings support much of what previous research has revealed about the working and living conditions of foreign seasonal agriculture workers. But it provides novel insights on workers' perceptions of the impacts of participating in the PTAT on their health and well-being, specifically during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, and within the context of Alberta, where workers face barriers for social interactions beyond the farm and for accessing services. It also provided insights into the challenges workers face in meeting the PTAT requirements and completing application process in Mexico, which could help to improve institutional mechanisms to better support applicants. The use of the PhotoVoice activity adds to efforts to actively engage with migrant farm workers through a participatory approach and enabled me to gather images from their everyday lives which are presented in the thesis. My research also provides an example of how migrant workers' experiences can be analyzed through a food justice theoretical lens, which underlines the need to recognize and uphold the rights of all participants in the food system.

4.3 Guiding Theoretical Perspective

The concept of food justice illuminates the inequities within a globalized food system and the need to advocate for the well-being of all people essential to our food production, especially traditionally marginalized actors such as migrant farm labourers (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010). Consequently, food justice challenges hegemonic structures and processes characteristic of the

capitalist ideology that is prevalent in the Canadian agriculture sector (Nyéléni, 2015), and incorporates intersectional analysis of the different dimensions (ie., class, gender, race) through which oppression is expressed and perpetuated. Thus, food justice creates a powerful platform for examining seasonal farm workers' experiences with the aim to better comprehend their distinctive challenges and needs. Yet, to date there have been few investigations using a food justice lens to examine seasonal farm workers' on-the-ground experiences of being essential yet marginalized players within international labour agreements.

In Canada, migrant farm workers are playing an increasingly important role in the food system but have been excluded from discussions where decisions affecting them are being made. Through the food justice lens, democratic participation is viewed as crucial. With the increasing number of migrant farm workers, it is pressing to critically examine the binational labour agreements and related programs that determine the parameters of their living and working conditions, hence directly influence their health and safety, and their possibilities to access permanent residency. Through the food justice framework, researchers and advocates argue that to create a more sustainable and just food system, seasonal farm workers must have a more inclusive, equitable and active role in decision making (Hochedez,2021).

4.4 Future Research Recommendations

This study contributes insights into Mexican migrant workers' motivations for enrolling in the PTAT and their lived experiences while working in the agriculture sector in Alberta. The information gathered during this investigation points to a spectrum of future research possibilities concerning diverse aspects of international labour programs at macro and micro levels. It would be interesting to explore, for example, how the PTAT and other labour migration

programs have shifted the social dynamics in rural communities in Mexico, and whether the knowledge and skills Mexican labourers have acquired in Canada are being applied within local contexts in Mexico. Learning about women agriculture workers' perspectives is important as there are likely unique aspects of their experiences related to their gender. How do they recreate their identities as transnational actors within the dominant patriarchal culture of the agri-food system? Having a larger and more diverse sample of research participants would be beneficial but would require the time needed to create connections to potential participants and build trust. Even though it is difficult to engage this population in research due to their fear of reprisal, the use of community-based, participatory methods can ensure that their voices are heard and fairly represented. Food justice provides a valuable framework to study the systemic power relation within the food system and through which the role of migrant farm workers can be discussed more deeply.

4.5 Concluding Remarks

This qualitative, community-based participatory research explores the experiences of Mexican farm workers who are participating or have participated in the PTAT in the Province of Alberta, where there have been few such studies. Participants expressed their appreciation for being able to take part in this research and for having their voices heard. But they stated that there are yet many things to be said and that there is a need to create more safe spaces where workers can speak up. SWAP and PTAT are promoted as model international labour programs – ‘the gold standard’. Yet my findings suggest that there are many failures in addressing workers’ rights and needs, which require urgent improvements at the institutional level in Mexico and Canada, and in the places of employment on farms and other agri-food businesses. Workers are

entitled to safe and dignified living and working conditions, and to being eligible for permanent residency, as an essential part of creating a more just and equitable food system. Hearing their voices is fundamental to achieving this. As an increasingly key labour component of Canada's agriculture sector, we owe migrant farm workers that respect. "Detrás de cada alimento, está la tierra y el trabajo de su gente".

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Script for Facebook

Versión en español

¡Hola! mi nombre es Maricruz Barba y soy estudiante en la Universidad de Alberta. Me encuentro realizando mi trabajo de investigación para la tesis. El tema y objetivo es conocer las experiencias de los y las trabajadores (as) del campo mexicanos que se encuentran en el Programa de Trabajadores Agrícolas Temporales, más conocido por su abreviación como PTAT concretamente en la provincia de Alberta. Quiero realizar entrevistas para conocer sus experiencias y al mismo tiempo utilizar la técnica de Foto voz. Su participación en la investigación es anónima ya que sólo yo conoceré a quienes participan. Si eres trabajador(ra) del PTAT y te interesa participar en esta investigación, por favor mándeme un mensaje privado para poder explicar más detalles de la investigación. Si hubiera alguna duda o pregunta por favor contáctenme a través de mi correo ----
De antemano agradezco su atención e interés.

English Version

Hi! My name is Maricruz Barba and I am a student at the University of Alberta. I am working on my thesis research. The theme and objective are to learn the experiences of the Mexican farmworkers that are part of the Temporary Farm Workers Program, better known for its abbreviation as PTAT, concretely in the Province of Alberta. I would like to conduct interviews to know their experiences and at the same time explain the PhotoVoice technique. Anonymity is important in this research, and participants real name won't be used. since I would be the only one knowing the participants. If you are a worker in PTAT and you are interested in participating in the research, please send me a private message to explain more the details of the research. Should there be questions please do not hesitate in contacting me through my e-mail ----
I thank you in advance for your attention and your interest.

Appendix B: Information Sheet and Consent Form in English

INFORMATION LETTER and CONSENT FORM

Study Title: From the voices of Mexican Seasonal Farm Workers in Alberta.

Research Investigator: Maricruz Barba

Supervisor: Mary Beckie

Introduction

My name is Maricruz Barba, and I am a Mexican international student at the University of Alberta. I am in the Master of Arts and Community Engagement Program. This investigation is for my thesis research.

Research purpose

The purpose of my research is to understand and illuminate the lived experiences of Mexican temporary farm workers in the province of Alberta, particularly as relates to factors impacting their health and well being, such as access to health services, culturally appropriate food and cultural integration. By opening spaces for dialogue, this research will enable migrant Mexican farmworkers to tell their stories of being part of the complex labour dimension of a globalized food system.

What is the research about? The research acknowledges the valuable contribution that Mexican agricultural workers make to Canadian agriculture and creates an opportunity to have their voices heard and made visible. The research focuses on the experiences of Mexican seasonal agricultural workers in the Province of Alberta, who are enrolled in the Program of Temporary Agricultural Workers (PTAT in Spanish). The information gathered will be used to make recommendations to create changes to policies affecting workers conditions during their stay in Canada.

Who can participate?

- A worker that is or has previously been in PTAT in the Province of Alberta, Canada.
- Spanish or English speaker. Participants can choose either language for the interview.

If you participate, to what do you agree?

- To take part in an interview between 60-90 minutes in length.
- To provide at least two pictures of significative elements that represent your overall experience of being part of PTAT and of your stay in Canada. These pictures will be discussed during the interviews. For the photographs, because anonymity is very important, it is strongly recommended that elements that may disclose participants identity be avoided.

Benefits

- For some workers there will not be a direct benefit.
- The information provided by the participants will be analysed to identify general themes that reflect the experiences of people participating in PTAT in Alberta.

Risks

- The risk of the interviews is that the identity of the participants becomes known by third parties. The disclosure of participants' identity could have reprisals on their work term; therefore, all efforts will be made to protect the identity of participants and their data.
- With participants permission, copies of the photographs of the PhotoVoice activity could be used for the final report, which could represent a potential risk to be identified. If that is the case, there will be efforts not to show photos that may disclose participants identity.
- In person interviews presents COVID-19 risks. Protocols will be adopted to mitigate risk of infection for the in-person interviews, such as the use of masks by both the researcher and participants, maintaining a safe distance of 6 feet, prior to the interview it will be needed to have health check up to make sure that there are not symptoms related to COVID-19, and the use of hand sanitizer will be necessary. If participants do not feel comfortable with the protocols the interviews can be conducted remotely.
- Interviews can be conducted remotely instead of in person, depending on participants preferences.

Payment or Remuneration

- The participants will be given an honorarium payment of CAN\$20 dollars to thank participants for their time and participation. The money can be transferred to a Mexican or Canadian account if the interview is conducted remotely or given directly to each participant if the interview is conducted in-person.

Voluntary Participation

- Participation in these interviews is completely voluntary.

Confidentiality

- The name of the participants will not be mentioned. In the reports, the researcher will use pseudonyms, meaning different names.
- Participants can choose the interviews to be in person, telephone, or online. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim in order to capture the content accurately. Interviews conducted in Spanish will be translated into English.
- The only person with access to the participants' contact information will be the researcher.
- All source data will be digitalized and encrypted.
- The University of Alberta requires all research data be stored for 5 years; this include interviews recordings and transcripts, as well as copies of the pictures from the PhotoVoice activity. After the required 5 years all data will be destroyed.

Freedom to Withdraw

- Participants can decline to answer any question they don't feel comfortable with and can also terminate the interviews at any time, if participants withdraw during the interview, the copies of the photographs and interview recordings will be destroyed. Participants have up to 72hrs to request their information be deleted, this mean the destructions of interviews recordings, transcripts, as well as the copies of photographs resulted from the PhotoVoice activity that the researcher holds.
- Participants can retain the incentive even if they request their data being withdrawn, meaning the copies of the photos, the interviews recordings and transcripts.

Contact Information

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact Maricruz Barba (graduate student); Telephone: xxx xxxxxx e-mail: xxxxxxxx@ualberta.ca

Or Mary Beckie (academic supervisor); xxxxxx@ualberta.ca: The plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have questions about your rights or how research should be conducted, you can e-mail to reoffice@ualberta.ca This office is independent of the researchers.

Signed Consent Statement

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form. I will receive a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

Verbal Consent Statement

The Information I have just agreed to it was given to me prior the interview. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered prior the interview. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study that is has been read. I will receive an electronic signed copy by the researcher of this consent form after I agree to it. Today date is ____.

Participant's Name (printed) and Signature

Date

Name (printed) and Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix C: Information Sheet and Consent Form in English

Nombre de la Investigación: Voces de los trabajadores temporales mexicanos agrícolas en Alberta

Investigadora: Maricruz Barba

Supervisora: Mary Bekie

Introducción

Mi nombre es Maricruz Barba, y soy una estudiante internacional de México de la Universidad de Alberta. Me encuentro realizando la Maestría en Artes y Participación Comunitaria. Esta investigación es para mi tesis.

Propósito de la Investigación

El propósito de la investigación es comprender y dar a conocer la experiencia de los trabajadores agrícolas de México en la provincia de Alberta, particularmente en relación a los factores que impactan su salud y bienestar, como es el acceso a los servicios de salud, alimentos apropiados y a la integración cultural. Al abrir espacios para el diálogo, esta investigación busca que los trabajadores agrícolas migrantes de México cuenten sus historias de ser parte de la compleja dimensión laboral de la globalización del sistema alimentario.

¿De qué se trata la investigación? La investigación reconoce la valiosa contribución de los trabajadores agrícolas de México en el sector agrícola de Canadá y busca crear la oportunidad de que sus voces sean escuchadas y visibles. La investigación se enfoca en la experiencia de los trabajadores agrícolas temporales de México en la provincia de Alberta, que están o han estado en el Programa de Trabajadores Agrícolas Temporales (por su abreviación en español llamado PTAT). La información recolectada se usará para realizar recomendaciones a fin de generar mejoras en las políticas que afectan las condiciones en las que se encuentran los trabajadores durante su estancia en Canadá.

¿Quién puede participar?

- Los y las trabajadores(as) que están o han estado en el PTAT en la provincia de Alberta.
- Hablar español o inglés. Los participantes pueden elegir cualquier de los dos lenguajes para la conducción de la entrevista.

Si participas ¿qué estás acordando?:

- A conceder una entrevista de entre 60 -90 minutos.
- A tomar dos fotografías que representen tu experiencia en el PTAT y de tu estancia en Canadá. Para las fotografías, ya que la anonimidad es muy importante, se hace una especial recomendación de no tomar fotos que puedan dar a conocer la identidad del participante.

Beneficios

- No existe beneficio directo de esta investigación.
- La información dada por los participantes servirá para elaborar temas generales y comunes que reflejen las experiencias de las personas que participan en el programa de trabajo temporal agrícola de Canadá.

Riesgos

- El riesgo de participar en la investigación es que se sepa la identidad de los(as) participantes por parte de terceros. El que se conozca la identidad de los participantes puede traer como consecuencia represalias en su trabajo, es por ello, que se hará un esfuerzo importante para proteger la identidad de los participantes y de la información que compartan.
- Con el permiso de los participantes, las copias de las fotografías producto de la actividad de pueden ser usadas para la elaboración del reporte final. Esto puede presentar riesgo ya que las fotografías podrían dar a conocer la identidad del participante. Es por ello que se buscará que las fotografías no tengan detalles que den a conocer la identidad del participante.
- Las entrevistas que se realicen de manera presencial deben de tomar en cuenta que hay riesgos debido al COVID-19; es por ello que se adoptarán medidas para minimizar los riesgos tales como el uso de mascarillas, tanto por el investigador como por el participante, mantener una distancia de 1.8 metros, previo a las entrevistas deberá realizarse un chequeo de salud de manera que no se identifiquen síntomas de COVID, y así mismo será necesario hacer uso de sanitizante. Si los participantes no se sienten cómodos con dichas medidas las entrevistas pueden realizarse de manera remota.
- Si los participantes lo prefieren, las entrevistas pueden realizarse de manera remota (por teléfono o Google Meet) en lugar de entrevistas en persona.

Pagos y remuneración

- Los y las participantes tendrán un honorario de CAN\$20.00 dólares canadienses en agradecimiento por su tiempo. El dinero puede ser transferido a una cuenta mexicana o canadiense si las entrevistas son de manera remota o entregado de manera física si las entrevistas se realizan en persona.

Participación Voluntaria

- La participación en esta investigación es completamente voluntaria.

Confidencialidad

- Los y las participantes deben de estar de acuerdo a que las entrevistas sean grabadas (sólo la voz) para posteriormente hacer un análisis de la información. En las entrevistas no se mencionarán los nombres reales de los participantes sino sus pseudónimos, así mismo no se hará mención de ninguna información que pueda identificar la identidad de los participantes.
- Los participantes pueden elegir que la entrevista se realice en persona, por teléfono o por Google Meet. Las entrevistas serán grabadas (sólo la voz) para realizar las transcripciones de manera precisa. Todas las transcripciones serán anónimas.
- La única persona que tendrá acceso a la información real de los participantes es la investigadora.
- Toda la información será digitalizada y resguardada en un archivo encriptado al que sólo la investigadora tendrá acceso.
- La Universidad de Alberta requiere que la información de la investigación sea resguardada de manera segura por 5 años; esto incluye las grabaciones de las entrevistas, las transcripciones, así como una copia de las fotografías resultantes de la actividad de fotovoz. Después de los 5 años requeridos, toda la información será destruida.

Libertad de retirarse de la entrevista y de retirar su información

- Los participantes pueden elegir no contestar a una pregunta si no se sienten a gusto con ella y pueden retirarse de la entrevista en cualquier momento. Si el participante se retira durante la entrevista, las copias de las fotografías, así como la grabación de la entrevista serán eliminadas. Los participantes tienen hasta 72 horas para solicitar que su información y contribución sea

retirada. Esto significa retirar las grabaciones de sus entrevistas, las transcripciones y las copias de las fotografías resultantes de la actividad de fotovoz.

- Los participantes pueden elegir retirarse de la entrevista y retirar su información, es decir retirar la grabación de sus entrevistas, transcripciones y copias de sus fotografías y aun así mantener el incentivo de \$CAD 20 dólares canadienses.

Información de contacto

Si tiene alguna pregunta en relación a esta investigación, por favor no dude en contactar a Maricruz Barba (estudiante de posgrado; Teléfono: xxxxxxxxxx e-mail: xxxxxxxx@ualberta.ca

O a Mary Beckie (supervisora académica); e-mail: xxxxxxxx@ualberta.ca

"El plan para este estudio ha sido revisado por el Consejo de Investigación Ética de la Universidad de Alberta. Si tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos o sobre la conducción de la investigación, puede llamar a (780) 492-2615. Esta oficina es independiente al investigador(a)."

Declaración de Consentimiento Firmado

He leído esta forma y me han explicado la investigación. He tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas y éstas se me han contestado. Si tengo más dudas sé a quién contactar. Estoy de acuerdo en participar en la investigación descrita anteriormente y recibiré una copia de esta forma. Voy a recibir una copia de esta forma una vez que la haya firmado.

Declaración de Consentimiento Verbal

Estoy conforme y de acuerdo con la información que acabo de leer. Esta información me fue dada previo a realizar la entrevista. He tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas y éstas han sido contestadas. Si tengo más preguntas sé a quién contactar. Estoy de acuerdo en participar en la investigación que acaba de ser mencionada. Recibiré una copia firmada por la investigadora una vez que haya acordado a la información que se me acaba de dar. La fecha del día de hoy es ____.

Nombre y firma del participante

Fecha

Nombre y firma de la persona que está recibiendo consentimiento

Fecha

Appendix D: Guiding Questions in English

Note: Before any interview, each participant had several talks where they shared questions and doubts. The following questions were guidance, but there was liberty to ask others, and participants were free to talk about other subjects. Therefore, the questions were only sometimes posted in the order they appeared.

The first part of the interview: Greetings

Second part: Questions before starting

Third part: Consent to the research, reading of the consent form

Fourth part: Questions due to the consent form, study, and PotoVoice activity?

Guiding Questions in English

1. Could you please explain why did you decide to take a photo of this? What are/is the element(s) that are/is significant for you and why?
2. For how many years have you been participating in PTAT in Alberta? Could you share what type of work duties you have had over the years?
3. What reason/motive/situation influenced your decision to participate in PTAT?
4. Could you please describe the process to participate in PTAT? Is it easy/difficult?
5. How has participation in the program positively or negatively impacted your life? For example, economically, socially, culturally, health and well-being?
6. Has the COVID-19 pandemic made the experience in PTAT different? How so?
7. When we talk about well-being, for you, what does that mean? What do you consider contributes most to your health and well-being? How does your work and stay in Canada/AB influenced your well-being? If it has negatively been affected, what would you need to improve your well-being during your stay in Canada/AB?
8. During your stay in Canada/AB, what would you consider to be the best part of it and what has been the most difficult?
9. Due to your participation in the PTAT program, do you consider there have been impacts for you, mentally and emotionally?
10. During your stay in Canada, is there an activity you enjoy doing the most?
11. What are the main similarities and differences from how you eat in México and how you eat here? How do you access food while working on the farms? What do you like and what do you dislike about the food you eat in Canada?
12. How do you deal with any health/medical needs during your stay in Canada? Is this adequate or are there ways this could be improved? Please identify these.

13. Are there health and safety risks at your job? Have you had any incidents during your participation in the program? If you have experienced an incident, could you tell how you deal with this at your workplace? Did you have access to adequate medical care?
14. In relation to your work during your stay in Canada/AB, in which ways do you think you contribute to agriculture, the food system and community life in Canada?
15. In general, what do you think is the impact that Mexicans, through these types of programs, have in Canada?
16. How does participation in these programs impact your life in Mexico?
17. Thank you for your time and participation, do you have any other comments or questions you would like to raise?

Appendix E: Guía de Preguntas en español

Nota: Antes de cada entrevista, con cada participante se mantuvieron diversas pláticas en donde compartieron sus dudas y preguntas. Las siguientes preguntas representan una guía, pero hubo libertad para realizar otras y los participantes tenían la libertad de hablar de otros temas. Así pues, las preguntas que se presentan a continuación no necesariamente se realizaron en el orden en el que aparecen.

Primera parte de la entrevista: Saludos

Segunda parte: Dudas y preguntas

Tercera parte: Consentimiento de la investigación. Lectura de la hoja de consentimiento.

Cuarta parte: Atención de dudas o preguntas sobre la hoja de consentimiento, sobre el estudio o sobre foto voz.

Guía de Preguntas

1. ¿Podrías compartir por qué decidiste tomar una foto de esto? ¿Cuáles son los elementos que son significativos para ti y por qué?
2. ¿Por cuántos años has participado en PTAT en Alberta? ¿Podrías compartirme los trabajos que has tenidos y cuáles han sido tus responsabilidades?
3. ¿Qué fue lo que te motivó a participar en PTAT?
4. ¿Podrías compartirme un poco sobre cómo es el proceso para participar en PTAT? ¿Es fácil/difícil?
5. ¿Cómo ha impactado positivamente y negativamente participar en el programa, por ejemplo de manera económica, social, familiar, cultural, de salud, en tu bienestar?
6. Desde que inició la pandemia del COVID-19, la experiencia de participar en el PTAT ¿ha sido diferente? De ser así, ¿de qué manera?
7. Cuando hablamos de bienestar, para ti ¿qué significa? En ese sentido ¿qué consideras que afecta tu salud y bienestar? ¿Cómo tu estancia y trabajo a Canadá/AB contribuye a tu bienestar? ¿Si hay algún impacto negativo qué necesitarías para mejorar tu bienestar en Canadá/AB?
8. Durante tu estancia en Canadá Alberta ¿Cuál consideras que es la mejor parte? Y ¿Cuál la parte más difícil?
9. ¿Considera que al participar en el PTAT ha tenido algún impacto en la parte emocional y en la parte mental?
10. Durante tu estancia en Canadá ¿cuál es la actividad que más te gusta hacer?

11. ¿Cuáles son las principales similitudes y diferencias de lo que comes en México a lo que comes aquí? ¿Cómo consigues los alimentos para tu comida cuando trabajas en las granjas? ¿qué es lo que más te gusta y lo que menos de la comida que comes aquí en Canadá?
12. ¿Qué es lo que haces cuando tienes una necesidad de salud/médica mientras estás en Canadá/AB? ¿Es la atención adecuada o crees que puede mejorarse? Por favor dame ejemplos de cómo.
13. ¿Existen riesgos de salud y seguridad en tu trabajo? ¿alguna vez has tenido algún incidente durante tu participación en el programa? De ser así, ¿cómo lo resuelves en tu área de trabajo? ¿tuviste acceso a servicios de salud adecuados?
14. En relación a tu trabajo durante tu estancia en Canada, ¿de qué maneras crees que contribuyes a la agricultura, el sistema alimenticio y la vida comunitaria en Canadá?
15. En general ¿cuál crees que es el impacto que los mexicanos, a través de este tipo de programas tienen en Canadá?
16. ¿Cómo el participar en este tipo de programa ha impactado tu vida en México?
17. Gracias por tu tiempo y participación, ¿tienes algún otro comentario o pregunta?