Including Farmers' Voices in the Farm Labour Debate

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Abstract

While promoting sustainable agricultural, it is important to both address the many challenges to farming sustainably in Ontario and envision a comprehensive food ethic. One of the greatest challenges and unjust aspects of farming pertains to farm labour. Working within a Gramscian perspective, inclusive of food justice and just labour frameworks, this paper will explore whether the systemic factors leading to vulnerable conditions for both farmers and farm workers can be addressed simultaneously. The naming the moment political analysis, inspired by Gramsci, requires the current conjuncture to be explored. This paper presents exploratory research, based on qualitative interviews with nine farmers operating small- and medium-scale sustainable farms in Ontario. By including farmers in the discussion, and placing farm labour within the broader food and labour juncture, we can better understand the use of precarious workers in agriculture as indicative of a broken food system. Workers, activists and researchers must continue their attempts to define just farm labour within the current moment to suggest steps toward a desirable future. Recognizing the precariousness of farmers, in addition to workers, and seeking cross-sector alliances offers an example of a step towards more just farm labour conditions for all.

Foreword

I came to the topic of including farmers' voices out of an exploration into understanding migrant agricultural worker issues. Before starting the MES program at York I worked on a farm alongside migrant agricultural workers for two seasons. During these two seasons I witnessed and heard many instances of injustice and exploitation. Trying to comprehend how our local food system is so dependent upon such an invisible and precarious workforce, I applied to study at York and commit to understanding what I had witnessed. During my time at York I spent a summer interning on a farm. Although I gained a considerable amount of knowledge pertaining to operating a farm, I realized how privileged I was to be able to intern, exchanging labour for knowledge, room and board and a small stipend.

Based on my own farm work experiences and the courses I was taking, I realized that this is an issue being discussed more and more in the public realm (albeit not on nearly as large a scale nor as critical a lens as necessary). After dissecting the migrant workers situation and food policy in classes, conversations and conferences/panels, I realized the avenue that is missing most significantly is exploring how to combine these issues in a way that offers tangible results. I also came to the realization that although migrant agricultural workers are faced with unique forms of vulnerability, primarily due to their lack of citizenship and racialized identities, the majority of farmworkers are undervalued, underpaid and working in unjust conditions. Additionally, many small- and medium-scale sustainable farmers face similar (though recognizably not comparable) challenges to earning a decent living. As my exploration into these issues progressed I was able to see the importance of linking farm workers' *and* farmers' struggles. By demonstrating that they are both a result of systemic neoliberal policies, it may be possible to create alliances between these historically separate groups. Through interviews with small- and medium-scale sustainable farmers I hoped to explore possible alliances and, if they are possible, to consider what they might look like. Although migrant agricultural workers deserve a voice in this debate and continued attention and support, it is my belief tangible results are not going to occur in isolation. By combining issues and working together, only then may we be able to see a more just food system fitting with the ideals of food justice movements.

Acknowledgments

The path leading to this major research and the secondary research used throughout is based upon coursework at the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University during the past year and a half. Several courses, independent studies and instructors were paramount in the foundational research processes that led my research in this final direction. Particular recognition must be given (in no particular order) to Dr. Rod MacRae's support and encouragement in understanding global food systems, local food policy and challenges for farmers; Dr. Mark Winfield's Environmental Policy courses that taught the importance of policy and allowed the flexibility to dissect labour policy; and Dr. Deborah Barndt, the supervisor of this major research, for encouraging critical perspectives and emphasizing the importance of actively responding to the issue.

In addition to the courses at York and these particularly strong influences, conferences, panels and organizations across the province deepened this research by presenting a wide array of issues and current discourse on food and labour issues that are ultimately all connected. Presenting the preliminary findings of this research and attending food conferences allowed me to meet superb academics and activists working hard to address farm labour, farmers' insecurities or a combination of both. The many people working on these issues give me hope for future collaboration and eventual success in achieving farm labour justice!

Finally I would like to thank all of those who made this research possible. Firstly, thank-you to the farmers who took the time to speak with me to share their insightful and important experiences. Special thank-you to those who commented on early drafts and helped edit my confusing writing in an attempt to make it as coherent as possible (Nicola, Rod, Mika, Graham and most significantly Deborah). And most importantly to my Jamaican co-workers who motivated me through two grueling farm seasons. I will always remember the conversation, while picking squash in the rain (after my co-workers were told if they didn't want to work in the rain they could go back to Jamaica), which motivated me to return to school to dissect how such treatment can exist. I hope this study will in some way work to improve the conditions on the farm you work at and so many others.

Jim: *My nephew he's, 'oh yeah I want to be a farmer'. He's a really smart kid, but I've talked to people who say 'oh, don't do that, it's a waste, you are so smart'. What? Don't you want someone really smart growing your food and taking care of the soil and feeding the populus? But there is like the perception that it's like the worst job to do. As a labourer, or there is no future in it. I think that's the perception too.*

What do you say to people who tell your nephew not to farm?

Jim: *I guess I would ask them why they think farming is not a good career. Why? That is, why would you see it that way? Why would you see a really smart, motivated kid, why would you say to them farming is not a good career option? Is it because you think it's devalued work? Is it because you think there is no value in it? Like what are your reasons for saying that? And then I guess I would try to say, who do you think is going to grow our food? Where do you think our food is going to come from in the next twenty years?*

Table of Contents

Terms and Acronyms

The following is a list of terms and acronyms used throughout this paper. As many hold ambiguous definitions or connotations, I have explained the particular meaning in the context of this research. Some acronyms have also been provided with a particular definition and therefore the terms and acronyms are presented together.

AWA: Agricultural Workers Alliance. A group associated with UFCW working on campaigns and collective agreements to strengthen the rights of agricultural workers in Canada.

CSA: Community Supported Agriculture or Community Shared Agriculture. A CSA refers to a program where, traditionally, community members pay a lump sum to farmers in the spring to support farm start-up for that season in exchange for a weekly or bi-weekly delivery of fresh produce.

EFAO: Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario. EFAO provides events and outreach to educate both farmers and the general public on ecological farming practices.

Farmer: The owner and operator or co-owner and co-operator of a farm. Although farm workers may also be farmers, for the purposes of this study farmers refer exclusively to those owning or operating farms in Ontario. All of those interviewed are farmers.

Farm worker: A person who is hired to work for a farmer either as a paid employee, volunteer, or intern receiving educational experiences, room and board, and a stipend.

Flexibilization of labour: refers to the process of creating flexible work forces. This often includes temporary and contract work that typically leads to precarious employment.

J4MW: Justicia for Migrant Workers. J4MW is an organization that works to promote the rights of migrant farmworkers and farmworkers without status. J4MW advocates for workers rights, educates the general public on migrant worker issues and works to create spaces for workers to be able to advocate for themselves.

Migrant agricultural worker: Throughout this paper, this term will refer to workers employed through the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) or the Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP). It will refer to those coming to Canada without citizenship or permanent resident status. However, "the use of the word migrant is somewhat imprecise, as people with diverse citizenship statuses migrate to work in agriculture in Canada, including Canadian citizens and permanent residents who often reside in sub/urban areas and either drive to work

or are transported by labour contactors. Some of these internal migrants cross provincial boarders…" (Preibisch, 2012, pg 85).

Paternalism: "Interference with others autonomy, justified by reasons referring exclusively to their welfare, goods, happiness, needs, interests or values" (based on Dworkin 1972, cited in Goodell et al, 1985)

SAPs: Structural Adjustment Programs. SAPs are conditionality clauses attached to loans from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The clauses emphasize economic recovery through austerity measures, deregulation, privatization and the reduction of trade tariffs.

SAWP: Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program. SAWP began in 1966 with 264 Jamaican migrant workers and now brings tens of thousands of workers from Mexico and the Caribbean. In Ontario, SAWP, authorized through the federal government Department Human Resources and Skills Development, is administered by a third-party, the Foreign Agricultural Resource Management Service, that was incorporated in 1987 to facilitate contracts. SAWP operates according to Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) between Canada and sending countries to provide short-term support to primary agriculture. These MOUs ensure sending countries are responsible for certain aspects of the program, including recruitment and government representatives in Canada. The Canadian government is responsible for other aspects, via various government departments, such as processing working visas. It is a completely employers driven program. The number of workers, from what country workers come from and whether workers return the following year, is dictated by the employers; however, workers are only permitted in Canada for a maximum of eight months during the peak season from May to December (although workers may come as early as March, they all must leave by December 15).

Sending country: The home country of migrant workers. Countries are referred to as sending countries as they are engaged in the process of contracting citizens to migrate for work.

Small- and medium-scale farms: Farm size may be defined by many factors including acreage, number of employees or market, but is most commonly defined by income. Although no concrete definition was given, the farms included as small- and medium-scale in this study identify as fitting within such a context. This association was made primarily due to target markets being more direct to consumers, farmed acreage, and having farmers engaged in providing farm labour.

Sustainable agriculture: Implies growing according to sustainable techniques; to be sustainable farms are not required to be certified organic, but follow practices that do not rely heavily on inputs and do not compromise the environment now or in the future. Farmers included in this study follow sustainable practices. A summary of these practices is provided in the *Introduction*.

TFWP: Temporary Foreign Workers Program. TFWPs in Canada are classified according to skill level in a system called the National Occupational Classification Matrix (NOC)[1] and provide a temporary avenue for Canadian employers to hire migrant workers in a range of occupations. Although TFWPs have historically not included occupations in agriculture, since 2002 there has been an avenue for agriculture workers under the name of The Pilot Project for Occupations Requiring Lower Levels of Formal Training (NOC C & D) or, the Pilot Project for short (As of July, 2012, the Pilot Project name has been changed to the Agricultural Stream of the TFWP).

UFCW: United Food and Commercial Workers. A union representing workers in food related industries across Canada.

Unfree: Unfree status is a term used by activists and researchers to highlight the lack of labour market mobility faced by migrant workers (Satzewich, 1991). As a result of their unfree status, migrant workers consequently are made to be a very reliable and compliant labour option (Basok, 2012)

Wwoof(ers): World Wide Organic Opportunities On Organic Farms. Wwoofers refer to people working on farms in exchange for room and board. Wwoofers are typically a very temporary labour force ranging in stays from a few days to a month.

[1] A slew of changes to the TFWP introduced in July 2014 complicate this definition, primarily changes to the TFWP in July 2014 suggesting the NOC system will be replaced with a wage level

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

In recent years, food issues have been finding their way into popular discourse. In particular, in 2007 there was a surge of popular attention to local and sustainable food. This theme made its way into many books, films, markets and conversations (Metcalf, 2008). As a result, people in the general public have become concerned about what they are eating and how their food has been produced. These people want local, seasonal produce from small-scale farms, a trend Gray (2014) has termed *romantic agrarianism,* capturing the notion that most consumers lack a comprehensive food ethic. This is to say, consumers often lack an understanding of the interconnectedness of the global food system and consideration of the unethical aspects food production. Nonetheless, the resurgence of food as an important social issue offers the opportunity to promote alternative systems that do encompass a comprehensive food ethic.

In reimagining a comprehensive and alternative food system, the labour required on farms is too often missing from discussions. Further, in cases where labour is being discussed, the issues of farm labour typically focus on the unjust conditions facing migrant agricultural workers rather than acknowledging the various forms of farm labour that exist. Additionally, there lacks recognition of the link between the challenges facing farmers and the conditions for farm labourers. Efforts to combine these issues must be made, especially with regard to labour forces for small- and medium-scale farms that do not always rely on waged-labour.

In these cases, intern, volunteer and farmers' own labour make up a significant percentage of the workforce. Finally, in instances where farm labour is being addressed, farmers are often not invited to join conversations, or are hesitant to participate due to fears of being vilified (Cole, unpublished 2012).

In order to address injustices for farm workers, I propose that collaboration between the food and labour movements must occur. However, given the current food and labour contexts, this is recognizably an idealistic goal. For such a collaboration to exist and be successful many shorter-term goals must first be envisioned. One of the first steps includes recognizing the systemic barriers leading to vulnerabilities for both farmers and farmworkers within the current context of neoliberal agriculture and labour policies. Although specific vulnerabilities for farmers and farm workers are inherently different, by recognizing that they exist within the same system, it may be possible to seek cross-sector alliances. Policies and programs aimed at enhancing farm labour justice will not be successful without recognition of the complexities of agricultural work and the vulnerabilities of farmers. Through the inclusion of farmers' voices, the very specific reasoning for hiring each labour force can be addressed. By including farmers in the discussion, we can better understand the use of precarious workers in agriculture is indicative of a broken food system that often leaves farmers vulnerable and forces them, by extension, to rely on vulnerable workers.

Changes in agriculture throughout the twentieth century have limited the ability for famers to survive on their land and make independent decisions (Green, Green & Kleiner, 2011). Within such a complex and hierarchical agricultural system

farmers are left with limited ability to control consumer prices. It is argued, the one area where farmers may still exert control over their profits is labour (Tucker, 2012; Preibisch, 2010). In an effort to control profit margins, many of the conclusions drawn by academics, activists and even media highlight the use of migrant worker programs as being attractive to the corporate agricultural agenda (Hanley, 2012). Migrant workers are argued to be a desirable labour option given their unfree status. Unfree status is a term used by activists and researchers focusing on migrant workers to highlight the lack of labour market mobility inflicted as part of program parameters (Satzewich 1991). As a result of their unfree status, migrant workers consequently are made to be a very reliable and compliant labour option (Basok, 2012). However, although necessary of analysis, this homogenous way of regarding farm labour arguably focuses attention on one piece of a systemic issue, threatening to blame farmers for surviving within a very complex system of neoliberal agricultural and labour agendas.

The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) was initially created in 1966 as a response to farmers' claims of being unable to find local labour (Satzewich, 1991). For those with freedom in the labour market, farm work is often seen as an unattractive option due to the many insecurities of seasonal labour, harsh working conditions and limited labour protections. However, challenges finding adequate farm labour is not a new phenomenon, having existed since before confederation (Faraday, 2012). As a result, there has been a long history of policies and programs trying to provide labour for farmers. Examples include the 1941 *Farm Service Force* offering day-by-day labour recruitment of adults, youth, and children

as well as the *Agriculture for Young Canadians* program promoting agriculture as both a viable summer job and future career to eighteen year olds (Basok, 2002). Such internal mobilization strategies have been relatively unsuccessful in meeting the demands for farm workers (Tucker, 2012). As a result labour saving technologies, of an increasingly industrialized agricultural production process, have been adopted to replace labour. Yet, especially on smaller-scale mixed vegetable and fruit operations, a significant amount of labour is still required (Findeis, 2002).

In an effort to explore the various labour options that do exist on farms, this study presents exploratory research that includes the voices of nine farmers. By providing a platform for farmers to present their views and experiences with different labour options on small- and medium-scale, sustainable farms in Ontario, we can better understand the labour options available. By contextualizing labour within the broader systemic barriers to farming, a deeper analysis of labour options is possible. Additionally, by creating space for farmers to share their experiences and opinions, begins to invite them into the farm labour debate. Farmers, as both employers and farm workers, offer a unique and important voice. Therefore, their voices must be included in efforts to achieve just conditions for all farm workers.

One of the barriers to a successful alternative food movement is that discussions are often occurring within silos rather than crossing disciplines and including the public sphere. Several authors call for the importance of bridging and creating alliances between various activists, scholars, communities and other food movement actors. Alkon and Argyeman (2011) argue, "cultivation of a food system that is both environmentally and sustainably just will require the creation of

alliances between the food movement and communities most harmed by current conditions" (page 331). In an effort to begin building bridges between the labour and food movements, this paper will explore the structural conditions that leave many small- and medium-scale farmers in precarious situations while highlighting their challenges around labour. By including farmers' voices while discussing farm challenges, farm labour options and the farm labour debate, we begin to envision ethical farming that includes just treatment of all farm workers. If we continue to separate these issues we perpetuate a false belief that assumes profitable local farming and just labour cannot coexist. However, we need to create as many alliances as possible to allow both farmers and farm workers to work in equitable conditions.

A food movement that lacks a comprehensive food ethic, inclusive of all voices, risks repeating the flaws within our food system that have led to severe injustices for both farmers and farm workers. To address farm worker injustices in our local food system, we must call to attention the systemic and historical factors that have been influential in reaching this juncture (Barndt, 1991). By using a Gramscian framework of naming the moment (defined below), this paper seeks to identify the current moment of farm labour to prepare for negotiating strategies that offer realistic opportunities for reducing farm labour injustices. I argue that farm labour can only be understood within the greater context of the current agricultural and labour contexts, separately and when they come together. In order to pay homage to the complexity of both agriculture and labour issues, in search of a

solution that promotes fair farm work, food justice and just labour will also be recognized as the guiding theoretical frameworks for this paper.

After laying the foundation of overarching systemic issues pertaining to farm labour in chapter one, chapter two will continue to combine primary and secondary data describing the current agricultural context and farmer challenges at the farm level. Next, the various labour options will be presented as described by the farmers participating in this study. An analysis of farm labour options, based upon these descriptions will be given in the third chapter following a definition of 'just' labour, and an overview of the farm labour debate. The analysis of farm labour options will lead to a discussion of the ideal farm labour force, which presents farmers' visions of what we may strive for with regard to farm labour. The final chapter will draw on the interviews to consider ways farmers might be included in the farm labour debate moving forward. As this is an exploratory study, I will conclude by suggesting further research and action that would direct us in better understanding what a comprehensive food ethic, considerate of just conditions for both farm workers and farmers, may look like and how it may be achieved.

Research Question

In order to respond to unjust conditions, it is important to understand the systems that are simultaneously allowing and encouraging these conditions to exist. Additionally, we cannot attempt to improve programs and conditions without including farmers in such discussions. As such, the overarching research questions directing this paper are:

How does labour fit into broader challenges facing small- and medium-scale, sustainable famers in Ontario?

What do farmers have to say about their experiences with various farm labour options?

What possibilities exist for collaboration between food and labour movements?

How do we envision a food system that is 'just' for farmers and farm workers?

Or, to summarize, can the systemic factors leading to vulnerable conditions for both farmers and farm workers be addressed simultaneously by recognizing their relationship and promoting dialogue and alliances.

Theoretical Frameworks

This research aims to frame both agriculture and farm labour issues as inherently connected. Approaching these topics from a critical perspective, we may analyze current practices in a productive fashion that seeks to achieve justice for all. Rather than encouraging radical transformation of the food system that disregards current realities, this paper will draw on the idea of naming the moment, discussed in a Gramscian inspired perspective promoting both conjunctural and structural analysis (Barndt, 1991). In an attempt to critically link agriculture and labour, this analysis examines the issue at hand through a lens of both food and labour justice.

Gramscian Perspective

Gramsci can offer a valuable perspective in many fields, but heavily impacts discussions pertaining to restructuring, labour struggles and alternatives to neoliberal globalization (Thomas, 2009; Bieler et al, 2006). Gramscian discourse is similarly valuable when exploring the impact of neoliberalism on a labour force, while offering the challenge of gaining a deeper understanding of the systems in which it is embedded (Buttigieg, 2009). As such, it is useful to utilize Gramsci's writing as an overarching theoretical perspective while imagining alternative food systems that include discussions of farm labour issues. Denning (2009) uses Gramsci's work to argue, "the most widespread methodological error" is to look at the "intrinsic nature of an activity rather than at the system of relations wherein this activity is located" (page 72). By questioning context and introducing farmers as participants in this debate, this study inherently presents a Gramscian framework in its' methodological approach and critical analysis (Jones, 2006).

Drawing on the work of Gramsci, the process of political analysis outlined for *naming the moment,* encourages recognition of the conjuncture and social contradictions of historical processes that are embedded in and have led to the present systemic inequities. This model is based upon Gramsci's attempt to explain why oppressed peasants and workers were supportive of Mussolini, a leader who did not act in their best interests. He was only able to understand this support by examining the specific relation of forces at that given moment. By identifying the conjuncture, or how different forces come together, it may be possible to

demonstrate why farmers are so dependent on vulnerable workers in the current context of global food systems.

The conjuncture must be based on a structural analysis that identifies underlying power relationships and deeper contradictions within our society. This framework suggests that we may begin to plan for action and imagine possibilities for 'just' farm labour only by beginning with the examination of the major features of both agriculture and labour. The *naming the moment* method is divided into four phases. The first step is to identify ourselves and our interests; this phase will be completed in the context of this paper in the foreword and introduction chapter. The second phase is naming the issues and/or struggles; a great deal of this exploratory study will focus on this phase attempting to identify and name the issues of the farm labour debate. The third phase in the *naming the moment* process is assessing the forces. This paper will begin to assess the issues; however, a greater assessment is recommended as the issue of farm labour is explored further. Finally, the fourth phase, planning for action, is where alliances, actions and future research are considered. This phase requires a great deal of research, collaboration and partnerships that may hopefully continue to evolve as a result of this initial research. The goal of *naming the moment* is to produce a holistic interpretation of farming conditions that have led to today's juncture of unjust farm work conditions in an attempt to find viable actions for positive change affecting all farm workers. (Barndt, 1991)

Food Justice

Food Justice is a broad framework encompassing critical thought for engaging in a progressive understanding of food issues. Alkon and Agyeman (2011) define Food Justice as "communities exercising their right to grow, sell and eat [food that is] fresh, nutritious, affordable, culturally appropriate, and grown locally with care for the well-being of the land, workers, and animals" (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011, page 5). A Food Justice analysis also critiques many measures being used to solve injustices within our food system that perpetuate the same neoliberal ideals that exaggerate injustices in the first place (Holt-Giménez, 2011).

A key aspect of Food Justice is recognizing food as a right rather than a commodity (Mares & Peña, 2011). When exploring issues around food, there is still a widespread focus on capitalist principles (including profit, growth and efficiency) rather than focusing on human and non-human well-being (McEntree, 2011). Especially when exploring issues of labour, Food Justice is an important avenue as it embraces Marx's critique of capitalism and recognizes the intrinsic dependence of capitalism on vulnerable and precarious labour forces (DuPuis, Harrison & Goodman, 2011). Food Justice is useful as an overarching theoretical framework as it simultaneously draws from and leaves room for a wide range of theories and perspectives critical of current capitalist monopolies while being sympathetic to social justice.

Authors and activists engaging in a Food Justice framework understand there is an extremely uneven power balance within the food system in terms of race, class and gender; local food systems are not always just, and many voices are missing

from the dialogue. The many voices missing from dialogue perpetuate that "whites continue to define the rhetoric, spaces, and broader projects of agrifood transformation" (Guthman, 2011, page 277). Guthman (2011) challenges the domination of white people in the alternative food movement to "think about how to use the privileges of whiteness in an antiracist practice" (Guthman, 2011, page 278). In recognizing my own whiteness as a researcher, the whiteness of most farmers interviewed, and the many missing voices from my research, I understand the limits this places on finding solutions and alternatives. By engaging in critical dialogue and challenging the status quo it is my intention to both find ways to create safer spaces for marginalized voices to represent themselves and to challenge white activists to reflect on our privilege and complicity within the food movement. An anti-racist framework focusing on justice for all (regardless of race, class, gender, ability and sexual orientation) must be central, not only for the inclusion of all voices in future research, but to successfully move towards a more comprehensive food ethic for all.

Labour Justice

Labour justice, similar to food justice, is a broad framework encompassing critical thought and action. Labour justice is in part defined by critical social theorists who contextualize the historical shifts in the labour force that have led to current working realities. Farm work in Ontario is tied to broader global structures and processes impacted by neoliberal policies and liberal globalization (Shalla, 2011; Foster, 2012). In the introduction to her text *Working in a Global Era:*

Canadian Perspectives 2nd Edition, Shalla (2011) claims authors writing critically of labour approach the subject in three ways:

> First, they challenge widespread assumptions about key issues pertaining to work in a global era. Second, they critically assess explanatory frameworks that have attempted to account for the transformation of work. And third, they are critical of the direction work is taking and of the ways that the livelihoods of working people and their families are being degraded and shattered. (page 9-10).

There are many examples of critical examination of diverse forms of labour; however, the diversity and complexity of farm labour as a part of a larger global agricultural system offers a unique perspective on these issues.

Many of the conditions and struggles of workers predate neoliberalism, yet the capitalist restructuring that occurred in the 1970s with an emphasis on the flexibilization of labour greatly affected agriculture (Choudry et al, 2009). Trade policies, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) brought tariffs and trade into the democratic sphere and impacted non-market aspects, such as labour policy (Jackson, 2005). The complexity of these issues must be understood from a critical perspective in order to begin to grasp the dependency of employers, in this case farmers, on flexible and vulnerable labour forces.

By understanding farm workers as neoliberal subjects in connection with food justice frameworks, we may begin to recognize the connection between both farmers and farm workers as subjects under complex systemic powers (Binford, 2013). Although the vulnerabilities of farm workers and farmers are being presented in this study as pieces of the same process, we must acknowledge the

inherent power differential between farmers and farm workers as employers and employees.

Methodology

This paper presents an exploratory study of a specific constituency: farmers operating at the small- and medium-scale, according to sustainable practices in Ontario. Qualitative interviews were conducted to supplement the secondary research accumulated over the past year and half of course work at the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University. Additionally, this research is guided by my three seasons working on farms in Ontario. Based on my experiences working for different farmers and as both a Canadian worker and an intern, alongside different labour forces, I developed a practical and theoretical understanding of farm labour that will be reflected in this paper (Jorgensen, 1989).

This is very much an exploratory study. The interview data collected for this research represents a small sample of personal experiences of farmers rather than a broad generalization of farmer experiences (Miller & Glassner, 1997). The interviews neither validate nor negate other data, but demonstrate particular experiences and raise specific questions (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997). Nonetheless, by integrating many quotes into my analysis of the interviews, I have done my best to provide summaries and descriptions representative of farmers' voices on the topic of labour in sustainable agriculture (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). Conducting qualitative interviews with direct and open-ended questions was an important aspect to this research.

I initiated contact with farmers via e-mail beginning in December 2013. The farmers were chosen primarily based on their commitment to sustainable growing practices; however, location and experience with various labour options were significant factors in narrowing the search. My farming experiences provided me with access to a network of farmers that fit this criteria. Of the famers contacted based on my network, their business websites or specific job postings, the nine farmers included in this study responded to e-mails and together we were able to coordinate an interview. Interviews were conducted between January and March 2014.

Five of the interviews were conducted on farms in farmers' kitchens and three were conducted over the phone. One farmer offered her perspective through e-mail correspondence. The interviews ranged from half an hour to one and a half hours depending on available time and how much the farmer had to share. During two of the interviews, spouses were present, however, since they essentially shared the same views and experiences, their responses have been blended together in most instances. In line with social science research, the questions were created for research purposes focusing around the specific issue of labour and allowing for participants to provide a testimony of their own experiences (Baker, 1997). Throughout the interview process, interview questions were adapted to explore certain issues not being addressed[2]. As a result of these changes and of time constraints, not all questions were answered by each farmer.

[2] The initial set of interview questions and the final set can be viewed as Appendix A and B respectively

Since the farming community is small and some of the topics reflect sensitive and personal information, names and other identifying factors have been changed to maintain anonymity. Any names used in this paper are pseudonyms. There was no compensation for participants beyond my immense gratitude and the offer to read this paper upon completion, with the hope that their voices have been meaningfully and accurately represented. Interviews were indexed, coded and organized based on key themes and ideas. Transcriptions were done only in part and when direct quotes were used. Every effort was made to quote participants to minimize replacing their consciousness with my own (Seidman, 1998), though it is recognized that selection and editing reflect my own analysis.

The majority of farmers in this study work with at least one business partner, yet only those who were present for the interview have been given a pseudonym. The sample is too small to make an analysis on the demographic of farmers and those that agreed to participate; however, to highlight some of the trends: four interviewees were male (two of whom were the primary operators), three interviewees were female and two couples[3] participated together. All of the farmers interviewed in person were visibly white. Two farmers mentioned immigrating to Canada, two were farming on family land, while two others mentioned direct financial support from family members. Although I am using pseudonyms, it is important to introduce each of the farmers and briefly describe their farm. The following introductions and descriptions are based on the farmers' websites and the

[3] The couples were both heterosexual

interviews. They are presented in the chronological order of the interviews were conducted[4]:

Farmers Interviewed

Don has been farming since he was eight years old. He left farming for 19 years to go to university and work in forestry, but returned to his family land in 1992 and has been there ever since. He lives at the farm with his wife and children. His oldest son is now very involved in the business. Little Donkey Farm has been certified organic since 1994 and is also certified biodynamic. When asked what his favorite parts of his job are, Don replied, "farming isn't a job, it's my life". This passion for farming can really be seen at Little Donkey Farm. The labour force at Little Donkey Farm consists of Don, his son, three part-time cashiers that work markets, one Jamaican migrant worker and two interns.

Jim also grew up on the land he now farms. He has been serous about farming this land since 2006 when he decided farming was what he wanted to do and returned to Old Thyme Farm. Jim works alongside his mother, three interns, volunteers and people coming through world wide opportunities on organic farms (wwoofers) and for this season, one of his younger brothers will be returning to work full time. Jim's wife and two daughters also live at the farm, giving the farm a real 'family farm' feeling. Old Thyme Farm hosts a bed and breakfast, ten acres of mixed vegetables, and a range of livestock including: chickens, turkeys, goats and two beautiful draft horses.

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[4] For a less descriptive summary of farmers, farm names and key farm features see Appendix C

Last year was the seventh season Jack and his partner have been operating Tall Oaks Farm. They started Tall Oaks Farm as a way to offer a concrete response to environmental problems. Jack's favourite parts of his job include the work, being outside, being his own boss and witnessing tangible results. At Tall Oaks, Jack and his partner are trying to operate according to a closed system; they have solar power and offset some of their footprint by planting trees. Last season there were four Mexican migrant workers working at Tall Oaks, with two more migrant workers during the peak season to distribute some of the workload.

At Three Sisters Farm, both Frieda and Glen participated in the interview. They lived part time on their land prior to farming and are now about to enter their ninth season. After attending a Seedy Sunday and falling in love with heirloom tomatoes, they started a 200 square foot garden. They are now operating five acres of mixed vegetables, with small livestock and value added products. Frieda and Glen enjoy experiencing and tasting their food, while connecting with nature, overcoming challenges and living an enjoyable and healthy lifestyle. To Frieda and Glen farming is a lifestyle, not a job. Over the years their labour force has been extremely varied, with lots of interns; this year they are hoping to find two full-time and two part-time employees locally.

Carolyn and her husband had interned on farms before they decided to start Walnut Grove Farm. Their first four years of operation they rented land. This year will be their second growing season on their own 85 acres of land. Of their 85 acres, 10 acres are in vegetable production. Walnut Grove has 100 CSA members and sells at local markets and some retail sales. Carolyn's role at the farm is primarily

administrative, dealing with customers and childcare, although she loves to be in the greenhouse and garden where they grow a wide variety of vegetables, herbs and flowers. This year Carolyn and her husband are hoping to hire a CSA coordinator, as Carolyn will be busy with the arrival of their second child. In addition to the CSA coordinator, they hope to find Canadian employees to work at markets and as harvesters. They will also re-hire three Mexican migrant workers.

Jay and Suzanne, the farmers at Morning Glory Farm, also participated in the interview together. Suzanne grew up on conventionally farmed land in the United States. They started farming organic clover together for three or four years before the bottom fell out of the clover market. At that point Jay and Suzanne moved to their current land at Morning Glory Farm and started growing organic seed. They now grow a variety of mixed vegetables on five acres and have nut trees. Jay and Suzanne are continuing with clover and seed, but for their own uses. They hire two Jamaican migrant workers for the full season and a third for half of the season.

The one farm in this study located in Northern Ontario is Sunshine Valley, run by Rachel and her partner. She became interested in farming through her partner and they bought their own farm in 2007. Rachel enjoys the physical aspects of her job and not having to leave her property every day. Sunshine Valley is a small-scale mixed farm with vegetable and some livestock production. Rachel discussed the challenges with farming in the north, as most other farms in their area are related to the dairy industry. Rachel and her partner are one of a small handful of vegetable farmers in the area providing more variety for their community. For the

coming season, they are hoping to find three full-time Canadian employees and offer a work-share model in exchange for a Community Supported Agriculture box (CSA).

Farming has been in Sam's family for years as his mother grew up on a farm, but his family immigrated to Canada when Sam was two. In 1997 he returned to farming, starting Green Acres Farm with his brother and wife. Since they began the farm, although they have grown beyond the small, artisanal scale, Green Acres has always remained human scale. This summer, in addition to the three famers, there will be three full-time Canadian employees, up to three part-time Canadian employees, a consultant for their agroecological program and one or two international farmers who will come to train with the consultant. Although they operate a market garden CSA selling to 1 500 families, Sam is conscious of working with other farmers in an informal co-op model to provide an alternative food system.

The final farmer interviewed, Gabriella, provided her voice via e-mail. She met her husband picking strawberries on his father's hobby farm. They have now been farming together for twenty-five years and operating their own small, organic farm since 2001. They have pastures, crops, livestock and offer pick-your-own fruit and value added options. Windy Ridge strives to be a family farm by employing family and friends. For this summer they have hired ten Canadian employees that consist primarily of their three children and their children's friends. Gabriella enjoys working outside, seeing the fruition of her labour and being self-employed.

Selecting 'Sustainable' Farms

The definition of sustainable agriculture varies depending on the source, but typically encompasses biological, environmental, animal welfare, economic, sociological and political considerations (Stonehouse, 2004). Although many define certified organic farms as sustainable, defining sustainable agriculture as those that are certified organic risks missing many farms that adhere to organic protocol (and often go beyond) but are not certified. Therefore, based on the definition by Stonehouse (2004) sustainable agriculture in this paper implies growing according to practices that do not rely heavily on inputs and do not compromise the environment now or in the future. Sustainable agriculture also suggests the use of multiple crops and animals to allow for healthier, more self-sufficient farming environments.

In farming according to sustainable practices, farm size must also be considered. Farm size may be defined by many factors including acreage, number of employees, or target market but it is most commonly defined by income. The Fruit and Vegetable Farmers Association (1996) defined small- and medium–sized farms as those with revenues between $10 000 and $99 999. According to this definition any farm producing over $100 000 would be a large- or very large-sized farm. Although this gives a sense of farm sizes included in this study, revenue was not formally discussed. Farms were instead chosen based on their acreage and their self-identification of being sustainable. The farmers in this study primarily sell at farmers' markets or through CSAs (although two of the farms now sell to distributers). Small- and medium-scale farms were targeted based on their role

within current societal trends towards supporting smaller farms and with the intention of being used as an entry point into farm labour discussions. It was assumed that farmers expressing interest in alternative farming practices would have an interest in discussing labour issues and would be conscious of food justice principles.

I focused on the region of Southwestern Ontario due to convenience; however, I conducted one interview by phone with a farmer in Northern Ontario. When contacting farmers for interviews, my main goal was to include farmers who are conscious of the inputs they are using and believe in the importance of farming with a minimal impact on the land. Notably missing from definitions of sustainability is the sustainability of labour. Although a diversity of labour options was consciously included in the criteria for choosing farmers for this exploratory research, the farmers offered their own definition of sustainability during the interview based on the way they operate and none of these definitions included the sustainability of labour.

When asked how they define their farm, many farmers used the terms "mixed farm" or "mixed vegetable", "small-scale", "market garden", "ecological" and/or "organic". When asked, "what is sustainable farming?" there was a lot of discussion pertaining to the desire to limit off-farm inputs. Don admitted it is difficult to define sustainable farming because even though he is biodynamic certified, he still uses fuel, plastic bags, Row Cover and other such inputs that are not necessarily considered sustainable. Jack said at Tall Oaks Farm, they aim for a closed system by reducing their use of fossil fuels and electricity, planting trees and using

their own naturally produced fertilizer. Jay and Suzanne said sustainable farming is not just operating on a smaller scale, but having a more responsible use of the environment. They provided crop rotation methods and animal manure as examples. Gabriella said,

> We view our farm as a circle in a chain - every element within the circle contributes certain components to the farm and without them it would break. We believe it is important to get back to real food, that which is GMO, pesticide, herbicide, hormone and antibiotic free.

The many definitions given point to the diversity of sustainable agriculture and also demonstrates the inevitable diversity and contradictions that any small scale producer must engage with given the lack of broader structural support. This range reiterates the definition used in this paper; sustainable farms are not required to be certified organic, but follow practices that do not rely on chemical inputs and do not compromise the environment now or in the future.

Chapter 2: Farming Challenges and Farm Labour Options

Specific Challenges for Ontario Farmers

Systemic Challenges for Farmers

In order to understand the challenges facing Ontario farmers, it is necessary to have a general understanding of the powers of the dominant global food system. Understanding the current rules of food systems, how they are working and how they are failing, is necessary to envisioning alternatives (Clapp, 2012). Changes throughout the past century have led to what Weis (2007) identifies as three broad classes of farms: small-scale, large-scale and massive-scale. Large-scale and massive-scale farms are able to produce in a way that lowers the cost of production as the system has evolved to support industrial agriculture. Although this study is focusing on small- and medium-scale sustainable farms, the power held by certain actors within the food system favouring agribusiness and large- and massive-scale farms is a key barrier to the success of farmers in this study. The current global food system is extremely complex; however, by providing a general overview, focusing on key issues, we may begin to see how local farmers fit in.

Changes throughout the twentieth century have led to large-scale, technologically advanced, capital intensive and structurally complex modes of food production (Green, Green, & Kleiner, 2011). A reliance on inputs needed to run farm operations highlight part of the cost-price squeeze that farmers face. The cost-price squeeze relates to the climbing price of inputs such as equipment, land taxes and quotas while the price being paid for agriculture products has dropped (Metcalf,

2008). Therefore, buying power or the cost of food, is the other part of the cost-price squeeze pushing against the complex modes of food production and inputs that presses in on farmers' autonomy.

In addition to the cost, the social value of food has a large impact on the challenges facing farmers. Consumers are by no means paying the full cost of food, yet demand for even cheaper food continues to rise. Households are spending on average less than 15% of their household income on food (Metcalf, 2008). Although there is much to be said about the costs of food, in reference to farmers, they are only receiving a small percentage of retail food sales. Much of the profit is going to manufacturers, distributers and retail outlets rather than the farmers themselves. Artificially cheap food is offered to consumers as a result of governments providing agribusinesses with direct and indirect agricultural subsidies. These subsidies come in the form of crop payments, water, research and extension, and immigration policy (Guthman, 2011). The direct and indirect subsidies affect farmers differently depending on how their farm operates.

With both direct and indirect subsidies favouring large-scale, chemical intensive, monocultural, market-driven products, farmers arguably have lost some control over their production strategies. This is especially true in cases where farmers are involved in contracting with manufacturers and retailers. Farmers' ability to control costs and survive on farming has been noticeably decreasing throughout the twentieth century. During this time many changes occurred within agriculture exaggerating the cost-price squeeze and limiting farmers' ability to survive on farming including: farm sizes increasing, advancements in technology,

controlled prices via marketing boards being lost, and the development of structurally complex modes of production, processing and distribution (Green, Green & Kleiner, 2011; Tucker, 2012). These changes evolved with a transfer in power to global locations and global traders, further complicating matters.

With so many variables associated with inputs and pricing, farmers' ability to calculate costs and plan for the season is extremely challenging, especially for those operating on a small- and medium-scale. Variable inputs that commonly figure in the calculation of cost structures are: pesticides, herbicides, fertilizer, fuel and natural gas, machinery repairs, building repairs, custom machinery, veterinary services, other maintenance and farm labour (LaFrance, Pope & Track, 2011). Increases in costs of fertilizers, diesel, fuels, grain prices, seed prices and farm wages are all negatively affecting farmers (The Standing Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, 2008). Many of these inputs are also associated with corporate concentration in the agricultural input sector (MacRae, personal communication, May 15, 2014). With corporate concentration in the agricultural input sector, large companies like Monsanto monopolize by being vertically integrated and controlling products and pricing throughout the agricultural process.

In addition to the farm level challenges from both sides of the cost-price squeeze, there are also many other concrete challenges for farmers. Currently much of the land being farmed is producing non-food commodities such as grain for feed and fuel. Looking more specifically at Ontario, Stewart Hilts of the University of Guelph, estimates only 10-15% of provincial food production is for direct human consumption (Metcalf, 2008). Rather than focusing on producing food, many large-

and massive-scale farms instead seek profits by producing crops according to industrialized, monocropping methods that reduce cost variability. This is done with chemical inputs a key part of the cost management strategy.

In 2012, 25.3% of Canada's 205 730 farms were located in Ontario. Of these farms 10.8% were receiving 68% of the total gross income for the province (Statistics Canada, 2012). This disproportionate allocation of revenues demonstrates the challenge for famers operating on smaller scales and not operating according to agribusiness paradigms that offer direct and indirect subsidies. Those attempting to farm using alternative and sustainable methods are thus presented with unique challenges and limited support operating within what is already a very complex and difficult farming environment.

Local Challenges for Sustainable Farmers

Given the many challenges and pressures of our complex food system, it is remarkable that farmers are still able to operate by alternative and sustainable practices. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, there are relatively few farms in Ontario following such practices. Of all the cropland in Ontario only 1.5% is used for vegetable production (Stats Canada, 2010). Of this, an even lower percentage is engaged in organic production[5]. In 2011 there were 3 914 certified organic farms across Canada with Ontario having the third largest number at 674, plus 33 in

[5] Although it was noted in the introduction that organic production is not the only school of thought in sustainable production, currently this is the only system reporting. It is estimated about half of the farms using sustainable and organic methods are not included in official calculations as they are not certifying (Schumila, date unknown). As such, it is recognized this data is simply being used as an indication of trends towards sustainability.

transition (Macey, 2011). By 2013 there were 774 certified or transitioning farms in the province; however, 67.7% of this certified cropland was being used for field crops and hay (Statistics Canada, 2013). Therefore, it is possible to see the small percentage of farms that are operating according to methods similar to those included in this study.

Financial challenges that have been identified to farming sustainably include start-up costs, access to expansion capital, cash flow, and labour costs (OCO, 2012). Further, the handlers, processors and retailers (identified as the stakeholders beyond the farm-gate) are making significantly more on sales than farmers themselves (Shumilas, date unknown). Following statistical trends in conventional agribusiness, the number of organic farms appears to be decreasing while the acreage is increasing. As governments and agricultural economists encourage an increase in farm size (Wiebe, 2012), even within the sustainable agriculture sector we are seeing this trend of agribusiness influences and increased in farm sizes.

The increase in agribusiness influence of organic farms, in addition to farm size, impacts the expansion of organic crops into non-food use, the corporatization of organic production and the lack of support for smaller scale, diverse farms. With the growing popularity in local, organic food, organic farming in many cases has transformed from providing a sustainable and alternative form of agricultural production to big business. For example, when I was first introduced to farming I spent two seasons working for a farm that only operates organically to catch a niche market. There was very limited care for the land or people growing the food, yet the farm continues to expand beyond its' capacity in an attempt to grow more food and

earn more profit. Alternatively, I interned at a much smaller farm that was not certified and takes much better care of the land, produces better products and sells direct to customers.

Since agribusiness greatly influences agricultural policy and programs, a lack of support for smaller-scale, sustainable farmers also exists. For example, many sustainable farms lack support to improve management skills and to promote innovative thinking; they compete against technology and high input methods, which constitute the content often taught in educational institutions (Stonehouse, 2009). The specialized skills and knowledge required for sustainable farming have often been lost and farmers are obliged to develop these skills on their own. Extension programs and infrastructure that supported rural development and sustainable practices have been steadily decreasing, with major cutbacks in the 1990s. As they are not supported for the work they are doing, sustainable farmers also lack compensation for the environmental services they provide to our soil, air and food. Additionally, in many regions where smaller-scale vegetable producers would prefer to be located, costs are currently more reflective of commercial development than agriculture and are impossibly high. (Metcalf, 2008)

Challenges Identified by Farmers

The farmers participating in this study identified with many of the challenges listed above. When asked to describe some of the greatest challenges they have with regard to farming sustainably, a wide array of answers were given. The question was left purposely broad and open-ended to encourage an array of answers,

touching on a wide variety of concerns most pressing to each farmer. Certain answers went beyond challenges specific to sustainable farming, referencing challenges all farmers must face. Although there are certainly challenges that impact all farmers, specific or unique challenges to farming sustainably were identified by most of the farmers. Identifying the challenges identified by farmers is important to understanding how farmers situate their role within the larger food system.

As well as the style of farming, scale is also considered an important factor since many farmers identified their smaller size as inherently more difficult to pursue given the current food system and local food policies. Overall, the challenges identified during the interviews fit broadly into five interrelated categories that touch on many of the issues listed above: skills, lack of governmental support, competition, finance and labour. The greatest number of challenges was identified in terms of skills and lack of support; however, many identified financial survival as the hardest or greatest challenge.

In terms of challenges pertaining to skills, the development of growing skills was identified as challenging by four farmers and the development of business skills by two. Related skills that were seen as a challenge were farming without synthetic herbicides and pesticides, and marketing. Without synthetic inputs, farmers are required to develop alternative knowledge and growing skills. This gap in knowledge of sustainable growing practices was addressed by Glen, "the Monsanto's and the Dow's and the Dupont's provide that education and support because they are selling through their product, but we don't buy that product so there is no one there to support us through that process." Additionally, it was expressed that

sustainable farmers are often required to do their own marketing, since there is little external promotion; a challenge discussed by three farmers. Although some farmers admitted they have trouble meeting demand, there is a common recognition that there is a general societal mindset that is suspicious of sustainable farming. Advertising that supports dominant notions of agriculture and food production reinforce this societal mindset. Jay and Suzanne described dealing with customers wanting seedless or packaged products; Frieda and Glen and Carolyn discussed the challenges with mass media articles such as those claiming organic vegetable also have pesticide residues. Many expressed a desire to be able to develop marketing skills that would allow them to advertise their products better to counter these suspicions.

A lack of support, most commonly with reference to governments, was also frequently discussed. Frieda and Glen spoke to the way provincial and federal governments are not paying attention to sustainable agriculture because they primarily support corporate agricultural models. Rachel specifically described how her local OMAFRA representative was not interested in organic agricultural and thus not interested in supporting her farm. Rachel also described how government regulations, quotas, and policies are not supportive of small- and medium-scale operations. Although there is demand for her products, such as meat birds, policies surrounding the quotas and abattoirs create a barrier for creating a more viable operation. This is also a concern for Jim. Jay and Suzanne said they are unable to sell their goat milk on the fresh market since it is unpasteurized.

In addition to a lack of support, the farmers in this study recognize they are often at an unfair disadvantage compared to conventional competitors. When listing their challenges to farming sustainably, three farmers noted the lack of media attention and thus a general lack of public support for sustainable agriculture. Instead, they said, media tends to support their competitors to an unfair advantage. It is not only the lack of support and direct competition provided by agribusiness that presents a challenge. Sam talked at length about the vertical integration, central to corporate concentration of the farming system. He sees this as the biggest challenge facing farmers; the fact that companies own and control necessary inputs, pricing, and various other key aspects of agriculture and food production. Carolyn discussed at length the challenges of keeping their products clear of impurities as chemical intensive farms are impacting soils and bees in a way that contaminates her farms. Gabriella summarized the complexity of competitors and the corporate concentration in the food system:

> There is now the presence of large corporate groups (Monsanto, Bayer) that are dominating/controlling the farm community through the perceived reliance of farmers on them to provide better seeds and chemicals to produce a better and more profitable crop. There is evidence that these inputs are detrimental but through corporate control, this has largely been pushed under the table. The power of the farmer has shifted from those stewards of the land, who understand and put back into the soil to commercial production that bleeds it for every last penny.

All of the challenges identified thus far impact financing a farm; however, the majority of farmers explicitly discussed start-up capital as a major challenge. Don stated, "the biggest hurdle was making a living in the beginning. Finding a market and paying the bills because the money doesn't come and every bill on the farm is

monstrous, especially at the start." Carolyn discussed not having any external labour the first years because they had no extra money. Jay and Suzanne described overall production costs as a great challenge. However, even after the first few years, Don and Jay and Suzanne identified making a living as the "hardest" or "biggest" challenge. Jack and Carolyn both noted making a living as a challenge. Sam identified the "farm income crisis [where farmers] are getting twenty-one cents[6] on the dollar", he continued, "so I think really we need to rebuild a regional food system, we need to regionalize our food a little bit more, because this global market is not working." With the domination of agribusinesses, farmers believe they are receiving too little financial compensation for their work.

None of the farmers in this study rely completely on their own, or their partners' labour and so, finding a labour force was commonly identified as a challenge. Carolyn recognizes that this is related to financial challenges and Jay and Suzanne described the difficulty agreeing to provide sufficient hours to hired work when they, themselves, have no guaranteed income. Further, several farmers also mentioned being able to afford labour as a significant challenge to farming. The various challenges surrounding labour are the primary topic of this study, yet it is important to include in this section, *challenges identified by farmers*, to demonstrate how labour fits within the greater context of challenges.

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[6] Sam raises a valuable point, yet unfortunately the return to farmers is actually lower than this. McMillan (2012) reports in the US sixteen cents per dollar go to farmers. For a more local analysis and discussion of the farm income crisis see *The Farm Income Crisis: Its Causes and Solutions* by the NFU found at: http://www.nfu.ca/sites/www.nfu.ca/files/Ministers_of_Ag_brief_FOUR.pdf retrieved May 20, 2014

The challenges identified by farmers provide insight into understanding how farmers situate their role within the larger food system. It is also possible to see the connection between the challenges. Five of the farmers discussed start-up capital and making a living as major financial challenges. Most farmers identified challenges learning or developing growing and marketing skills. The challenges surrounding skills were often associated with a lack of governmental support; this lack of support also includes the policy barriers to diversifying their operations. Discussions on the lack of governmental support additionally demonstrate farmers' understanding that their smaller scale, mixed operations, are not the focus or priority within the current agriculture context. By focusing on particular conventional commodities, the competition discussed by farmers with larger scale agribusiness can be seen especially with regard to the media attention that exaggerates this competition. Finally, labour was discussed as a big challenge; including farmers need to balance their own work-life relationship. Although these were the primary challenges identified by farmers during this study, the connection with broader systemic challenges can be seen. Additionally, we are able to see how these systemic challenges come into effect at the farm level.

Why Farm Sustainably

Just as definitions of sustainable agriculture may vary between individuals so too do farmers' reasons for farming sustainably. As previously mentioned definitions of sustainable agriculture typically encompass biological, environmental, animal welfare, economic, sociological and political considerations (Stonehouse, 2004). The farmers included in this study have their own sustainable methods

according to their beliefs on what defines sustainability and what works within the context of their operation. Each of the farmers was asked how they became interested in farming and why they were interested in farming sustainably. Similar responses were given from all nine farmers; that they see farming sustainably as the only way to farm. Both Jim and Carolyn mentioned an interest in social justice, claiming that farming is the best way they see to address this. Carolyn and Jack mentioned environmental interests, both finding farming to be a very concrete way to address environmental problems. Don, Jim, Suzanne and Sam all grew up on farms or mentioned a family history of farming.

Others approached farming later in life as a response to various experiences. Rachel became interested in farming through her partner and had previously worked in food preparation. Before farming, Frieda worked in restaurants and supermarkets. These experiences taught her how much "crap" is in our food, which became a driving force for farming according to sustainable practices. Many mentioned they would see no other way of farming and it is the only method that makes sense for their health, their farm environments, and their businesses.

The Importance of Labour for Farmers

As with any employer, the importance of a dependable, hardworking labour force is paramount. In agriculture labour is even more pressing due to the time-sensitive nature of crop production. Vegetable production presents unique characteristics, making labour even more important than other agricultural sectors. Many vegetables are highly perishable and must be harvested within a short

window, storage costs are higher, many products have a multi-year investment and there is less opportunity for mechanization on mixed farms (CHC Grower Data, 2003). Additionally more human power is typically required on sustainable operations than conventional operations (Locke, 2012).

The Organic Council of Ontario (OCO) conducted a study focusing on the organic sector, in 2012. The study found that conventional growers, on average, hire the equivalent of 7.3 full time employees; partially organic operations hire, on average, 4.6 full-time employees; and fully organic operations hire, on average, 12.5 full time employees. In addition to these employee breakdowns, it was found that 35% of growers report major issues with labour costs, 43% report minor challenges, 15% report no challenges and 7% report labour costs are not applicable. With 78%, of farmers reporting some degree of challenges with labour costs, the study suggests farm labour is not getting the required attention and support (OCO, 2012).

With drastic declines in the number of people living on farms and in rural communities over the past century, farmers must recruit workers from off-farm. Higher standards of living and employment conditions are offered in other occupations, impacting farmers' abilities to attract workers. This is further exaggerated by seasonal operation (Schryer, 2006). The inability to attract workers is arguably tied to the fact that labour remains one of the only ways farmers can exert any form of control over their net incomes (Preibisch, 2010). With so many operating costs that are outside of farmers' control, minimizing labour costs is one of the few options available to maintaining a livelihood.

Even with efforts to minimize labour costs, they remain a significantly high percentage of total operating costs on farms. Farm operating costs may include: fertilizer, pesticides, fuel, machinery, seed, feed, land, taxes, and interest (Ministry of Agriculture and Food, 1990). Labour costs of any business traditionally account for 15% of all operating costs, increasing in more labour intensive sectors (Basok, 2012). In small- and medium-scale sustainable farms, many of the additional inputs are not being used; however, the costs of labour are significantly increased. When asked what percentage of overall operating costs went to labour, the farmers answers ranged from 10% to 75%; however, when asked if they were including their own labour costs, many were not. When asked to estimate the total percentage of operating costs, including their own labour, many found the question much harder to answer. Many farmers expressed not paying themselves a full wage and others expressed the difficulties in separating their personal living expenses and investments in the business. Upon reflection, the average estimation for operating cost for labour was 35%. Since the source of labour greatly affects the costs, exploring and experimenting with various labour options is necessary to successful farm operations.

Farm Labour Options

Although the importance of farm labour within agriculture may be easily seen, there has been a lack of attention to labour within the food movement. As farming as a profession has been devalued, farm labour has been devalued to an even greater degree. The invisibility of these occupations may in part be tied to this

devaluation (Brown & Getz, 2011). The limited effort that does exist to include farm labour within the food movement tends to focus on migrant labour. However, by discussing farm labour, in all its forms, we may begin to better understand the complexity of the farm labour debate. Farm labour is not a homogenous concept and therefore we cannot make generalizations about all, or any, forms of farm labour. The conditions working on farms are also extremely varied. Despite the varying forms of farm labour and conditions, there is general agreement that improvements must be made for the well being of farm workers (Findeis, 2002). The labour options have not been divided to encourage xenophobia or to put work forces against each other, rather to explore why, from a farmers' perspective these variations exist and why some are preferred or encouraged.

The following is a summary of the primary and supplemental labour forces, I have identified, utilized by small- and medium-scale sustainable farmers in Ontario. The primary labour options include: intern, Canadian and migrant worker and farmers' own labour. A chart and summarizing paragraph highlighting the strengths and weaknesses discussed by farmers immediately follows on page fifty. In this section supplemental labour discussed by farmers will also be noted, but the various supplemental labour forces will be put together within one subsection, as they were not discussed in detail. The following summaries are comprised of farmers' discussions of their experiences with various labour forces used throughout the history of their farm[7]. The summaries are first offered here with minimal analysis

[7] These responses are based off of comments throughout the interview, with the majority of data coming from variations of the following questions:
What form of labour do you use on your farm?

beyond farmers' voices so we may begin to understand farmers' experience before analyzing and placing labour options within the larger context. Although certain quotes and summaries from the interviews deserve immediate attention, the entire third chapter is devoted contextualizing labour. Rather than selecting specific quotations for analysis here, the analysis section (beginning on page sixty-two) addresses most of the farmers' experiences and opinions presented below.

Intern Workers

In this context interns refer to individuals, primarily young Canadians, exchanging their labour for farming education. Generally included in this exchange is room and board and a stipend. All farms except Morning Glory and Windy Ridge currently use or have used intern labour. It is generally agreed that there are both positive and negative aspects to hiring intern labour. Additionally, experiences with interns often vary from year to year. Carolyn discussed this, "the third year was a wonderful intern year…just fantastic people, they gelled really well together and we all got along really well. So I think that year kept us thinking that it was possible and that the benefits outweighed the costs, but since then we haven't had much success". Don agrees that experiences vary, "some of them have been wonderful, but some of them have taken a lot of effort". Sam furthered this, "we had a lot of really great interns, some of whom have gone on to start their own farm, and then a lot who are quite unable."

According to Sam:

How have your labour needs changed over the years?
Can you outline the pros and cons/benefits and challenges of each labour force?

> 15 years ago you couldn't get an internship on a farm, even if you were at the University of Guelph. Like farms around here, they didn't want anybody to come in because they were afraid of competition, right? They didn't want to set other people up farming because it's just more competition than needed. The new farms, the small farms have now stepped up and created these internship programs so that more young people can learn because really we believe we need more small-holder farms.

This frames the greatest benefit associated with internships, mentioned by five farmers: to teach, share knowledge and educate. Internships are also seen as positive due to lower labour costs, a benefit explicitly acknowledged by Don, Rachel and Sam. Carolyn also described a sense of comradery between interns and farmers when "you are all sort of slugging it out there for nothing".

Reasons deterring farmers from the use of internships primarily relate to the unreliability of interns. Frieda and Glen's experience has been that many interns come with different expectations of farming and are there simply to pass the time until something better comes along. Carolyn also has experienced interns leaving when their expectations are not met. This lack of commitment and uncertainty has cost Walnut Grove Farm:

> We have lost thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars on crops that we couldn't harvest or projects that we had planned to get done or just lost momentum when there is an emotional disruption of interns leaving. There is a lot of talk about using free labour, but I don't think it's free. I think there are large costs to that labour relationship.

Sam expressed frustration in training people who are not necessarily going to stay in agriculture and the difficulties of sharing personal space. Finally, the lack of continuity and amount of effort to re-train interns every season was described by Don, Jim and Jack as a challenge to intern labour.

Although educating a new generation of farmers in generally recognized as positive, there are many considerations identified that must be weighed when taking on interns. Rachel claims that, "with an internship you have to be cognizant of whether or not it's a learning opportunity versus, you know, just straight up labour." Sam believes that internships exchanging only knowledge, rather than wages, can attract more serious interns who intend to learn and build skills; however, Carolyn discusses how trading education for labour risks conflict due to differing expectations. Rachel came to "the realization that they are not earning a living wage. It's not a fair situation, I don't think it's illegal, but I do think it's unfair and unjust, which is why were are moving to just paid work"; an opinion that is shared by the farmers at Morning Glory who have never hired interns. After their varied experiences with interns many farmers have since left this model. Three farms are moving towards offering only paid employment, one has reduced the number of internships and intends to be more selective, and one farm has completely moved away from the intern model and will not use interns any more.

The overall sentiment towards interns varies amongst farmers. There is a noticeable trend that the more established a farm becomes, the less farmers rely on intern labour. The positive attributes of intern labour generally include low labour costs and the realization that they are educating a new generation of farmers. The negative attributes most commonly mentioned are primarily concerned with the lack of commitment and dedication interns demonstrate, the time required to train and supervise interns and the requirement to provide housing.

Canadian Workers

Of all the labour forces discussed, Canadian workers were the most contested. For Frieda and Glen hiring Canadians is the best model they have found, having tried every model except for migrant workers. Gabriella only hires Canadian workers. Frieda and Glen found that short term employment and interns do not make sense since they cannot provide the accuracy, quality and speed that long-term employees are able to develop. Rachel finds "you can ask pretty well anything of them" and Sam likes Canadian employees as he finds them more professional than interns. Carolyn has limited experience with Canadian employees, but from her brief experience and in comparison with migrant workers, who are also getting wages, she believes Canadian workers are less complicated than interns because it is clear what is being exchanged: labour for wages. Overall, five farmers are satisfied and able to provide on farm employment to Canadians, however, in their experience Jay and Suzanne struggle to find Canadian workers. As a result do not expect to hire any Canadians this season, leaving four farmers expecting to hire Canadian workers this season.

Canadian workers do not come without their costs to farmers. Don hires part time cashiers to work at his market, but not on the farm since in his experience "sometimes they lasted the season and I couldn't get them back the next year…anyone that was good I never got back. A lot of them quit before it was done, they didn't show up, they just wouldn't stay working at the same job for three days." Jay and Suzanne have never had a Canadian employee survive a full season and in their experience most people have a lack of experience, strength, and efficiencies.

Although they had one particularly positive experiences with a Canadian worker who, according to Suzanne, "loved it, but he couldn't make the money with us that he could in the oil fields so he had to go off again. We tide people over, I guess, is the way our workforce profile is. Which is not great because we need people who are really dedicated."

Even though Canadian employees are Sam's preferred labour option, he admits it is hard to hire local. In his experience "we don't really find people who can step into the agriculture side of things at the pay scales necessary." Frieda and Glen also prefer Canadian workers, but admit it took them years to be able to pay for labour. They have heard:

> The rule of thumb is you have to have 75-150 thousand dollars in revenue to be able to afford to hire staff. Under that point you're just making enough to keep yourself above water, let alone hiring a lot of staff. So we're in that ballpark now, we've got a financial model that supports it. And we did last year as well.

Jack has hired locally in the past, but found "the problem with [Canadian employees] is they just don't work, they are not very productive, the people that we hired. They are not willing to work as hard as necessary to be productive on a farm".

Discussions highlighting Canadian workers were quite varied. Many farmers compared this labour option to interns and prefer Canadian workers. In these comparisons it was observed Canadian workers are more professional and can be asked to do more than interns; but they come at a greater financial cost. Additionally, many negative attributes were also give such as being unproductive and lacking experience, strength, efficiencies, productivity and physical mobility.

Migrant Workers

Four farmers in this study employ migrant workers and three others have considered this labour force as an option. Of those employing migrant workers the discussion primarily highlighted the positive aspects of this labour force. When Don was first considering hiring migrant workers, "my wife at the time wouldn't let me. She said 'it's an extension of slavery and I will not stand for it'. Well I went to [a friend's] place to talk to the Jamaican guys there… and they changed my outlook, but it wasn't until [my wife at the time] left that I did hire a Jamaican worker. I had to reconcile that in my mind because I certainly didn't want that on my conscience."

Carolyn moved to migrant workers on recommendation from their financial advisor. From the perspective of farmers employing migrant workers, the only negative aspect of the program with regard to their business is the extra cost, although Carolyn did mention the additional administrative work and the language barrier. In terms of finances, Carolyn claims Walnut Grove now has to sell more food to make it work and Jay and Suzanne figure SAWP workers cost them $20 an hour once the wage and all extras (such as the flight, electricity, telephone and weekly transportation to town for groceries) are considered.

Many positive experiences were associated with workers through the program. Don described how the SAWP worker on Little Donkey Farm will do anything and often does the jobs that must be done, but Don himself, hates doing. Further, "in most case they go home a rich man" and "they seem to be happy all the time", says Don. Jack said, "the last two seasons we've hired offshore workers from Mexico and that has been the best model by far". Having tried all other forms of

labour, Jack is happy to pay the extra costs associated with the migrant worker program because "having gone through all of those stages that we talked about, the evolution of our labour, I know how valuable these guys are. To have an experienced crew come back every year just totally changes my life and changes the business."

Carolyn says migrant workers are easier, "the guys from Mexico know what they are getting into and they know how to work and there's no chance that they are going to leave." Finally, the benefits of migrant workers named by Jay and Suzanne are: they are reliable, they do not complain, they are able to take care of the farm when Jay and Suzanne are at market, they want to come back each year and they know hard work. Jay expressed his initial concern with the SAWP requirement to provide 50 hours a week:

> We thought, 'my god, 50 hours per week, they are going to complain'. The Jamaican liaison said, 'no that's what they want, they want to make as much as they can'…we force them to have one day off and they don't want that…I don't think there is anything that is imposed on them. If there was anything imposed on them they wouldn't come back.

Of all the labour options discussed, migrant workers was the most positively described. Although not all farmers have employed migrant workers, there is a general assumption that they are professionals, have a strong work ethic, are happy to work and provide continuity between seasons. The negative features given were the additional financial costs, language barriers and additional administration.

Own Labour

Often forgotten or ignored when discussing farm labour is the labour provided by farmers themselves. Jim says he tries to only work 12 hours a day, 6.5

days a week in the summer. Jay said, "in the summer, I mean, rarely we go to bed before midnight and we are up before 4." Don has put himself in the hospital with exhaustion from over work. In addition to long hours on the farm, of the farmers asked, all have or do work off-farm.

When asked, "have you ever worked off-farm to support your farm" all answered that they had, except Rachel who answered:

> No I wouldn't say that, we do sometimes work off farm, but it's not to support our business, it's to support our life. So it's not that my pay cheque would go to paying wages, it goes to paying our bills. The farm supports itself, but sometimes our work within the farm context doesn't support us.

Jim answered:

> Oh yeah, quite significantly, I worked off-farm yesterday…When I first started like 2006, 2007, I worked part time off the farm here and there in the summer too, but it was very part time. I mean, full part time kind of, but in the winter, yeah even now, I will take up extra work.

Of the farmers in this study there is a noticeable trend that as their business grows the less time they are required to work off-farm and the off-farm work tends to be more related to the farm. For example, at Green Acres the farmers now sometimes give paid tours or talks, but in the past Sam worked in photofinishing and landscaping. Similarly, Jack said last year everything he did off farm was related to the business.

Carolyn and Jay and Suzanne discussed how working off-farm, even in the off-season is distracting and compromises the work at the farm. Carolyn elaborated by saying,

> We found it very distracting because those months you could be, well, resting and then re-visioning for the next year are lost because your focus is elsewhere. So this is the first year we have been able to go to

> markets through winter and be able to organize our finances so we have cash flow through the winter and not have to seek work elsewhere and it's been a great change in many sense, but mostly just on staying focused on the farm, not losing our focus.

Farmers' own labour is important to include in farm labour options as farmers are working extremely hard to maintain their business. The farmers are all farming by choice, some deciding to return to their family land after pursuing other endeavors. In addition to farming by choice, positive attributes of using their own labour is the reliability if offers. The negative aspect is the realization that they are often not earning a livable wage, or that it took years to do so. This often means over work and working off farm.

Supplemental Labour

In addition to the primary labour forces described above, each farmer drew attention to an alternative or supplemental labour force they have either used or considered using. The most commonly discussed supplemental labour was that of wwoofers[8], which have been hosted on occasion by five of the farms. Gabriella cannot take wwoofers although she has been requested to, due to lodging requirements. Don does not accept wwoofers any more due to lodging and meal requirements. Frieda and Glen realized that wwoofers are too temporary to support their needs. Walnut Grove Farm had ten wwoofers throughout one season and although it was an opportunity for cultural experiences, it was socially challenging and there was no labour commitment from the wwoofers. Sam gave examples of

[8] Wwoofers refer to people working on farms in exchange for room and board. They are typically a very temporary labour force ranging in stays from a few days to a month and working fewer hours than other labour options.

wwoofers ranging from "French kids who really rocked it out for us for six weeks, and some German boys who did great for a month and really helped us out, but overall not that dependable."

Several farmers also mentioned the temporary use of volunteers interested in helping out on the farm very short term; Sam expressed the importance of accommodating volunteers because of Green Acres dedication to being a community farm. In addition to wwoofers some farmers talked about the use of family members and friends working as a form of labour. At Old Thyme Farm, Jim's mom and now brother work full time on the farm. Carolyn's parents sometimes help out at the farm and at markets. And Frieda and Glen have had friends assist in the past.

Rachel and Sam were the only two farmers who discussed an additional labour role existing on their farm. At Sunshine Valley there is the option for one or two community members to participate in work-shares that exchange a weekly day of work for their CSA box. Although Rachel does not consider this exchange really about the labour since the people participating in the work-share are not productive, there is a positive relationship and it is a nice weekly mix in the crew. An additional benefit of community members engaging in a work-share model is they then may become an ambassador for the farm. The unique labour force at Green Acres is a doctor of botany who consults on agroecological farming. Although consulting is not a primary farm labour force, as a result of this expertise, Green Acres also engages in an international educational exchange supporting farmers from other countries. The unique opportunity for a knowledge swap not only

supports the growth of the farm, but it also attracts other primary labour forces with the opportunity for enhanced education.

Although do not have personal experience Jay, Suzanne, Don and Sam raised other examples of farm labour. Jay presented a labour force that does not exist and has not been offered, but one that he would support; having "a pool of [workers] in Toronto and you could just go… and you only hired them for the number of hours you needed them." Suzanne furthered this, "Yah, [he] would love that. Like those day labourers that we could only use them when we needed. For small farms like us that would be fabulous."

Don expressed interest in what he called "roaming crews". He said:

> I often get one or two calls a year offering a service where they will come to your farm, a 10 person crew, they are often Sikhs, and the foreman, you pay the foreman, everyone is ten bucks, you pay the foreman- because there is no minimum wage on the farm, you don't have to pay 10.25 an hour… they are usually in a ten man van and everyone is ten bucks an hour and the foreman doesn't work, he just foremans. And I've heard from other farmers they do a good job, a little bit slow, that's what they say, but this is farmers' production, so it costs you a thousand per day and it's cash only. So I don't know if they are legal to be working in Canada. I don't know that, I don't know if anyone asks that. I've often been tempted… I've always thought about it, but never tried them. And also I was a little bit nervous that they weren't legal, I like things to be legal, and paying cash, I would rather pay in cheque so we could track it. It's a legitimate expense.

Sam described an offer he heard of earlier this year,

> It's essentially a form of indentured servitude coming in from outside of the country. Only with white collar people organizing it here, only not the migrant worker program, and this was offering us up to 50 Vietnamese workers, we could have them for a month for free…by a private human resource firm looking to place workers with us for the season. And it's so, it's quite a change in scope and as we see the farms break down, we see much larger farms taking over and we do see indentured servitude coming in on these farms.

Sam was unclear of any further details, but raised this in discussions surrounding farm labour as something that is possibly being explored by other farmers.

Although the supplemental labour forces discussed here will not be analyzed in great detail, it is important to recognize the various farm labour options. Some of the supplemental labour forces, such as volunteers, are not really thought of as labour; however, others, such as wwoofers, are sometimes seen as providing assistance throughout the season. Additionally, there are many labour options that have not been explored by farmers, but they have been made aware of through their networks.

Summary of Primary Labour Options From Farmers' Perspectives

Labour Option	Strengths	Weaknesses
Intern Workers	-educating a new generation of farmers -low labour costs, in exchange for farm training	-lack of: continuity, commitment, reliability -sharing of personal space -requires training and supervision -comparable to weaknesses of Canadian workers (with the exception of cost)
Canadian Workers	-can ask more of them than interns -more 'professional' than interns	-unproductive -lack of experience, strength, efficiencies, productivity, physical mobility -lack of commitment and continuity -financial cost
Migrant Workers	-know how to work, "professionals" -generally easier than other labour options -the workers know what they are getting in to -strong work ethic -'happy' or willing to work/work long hours -no fear of workers leaving mid-season -continuity between seasons	-higher financial cost -language -administration
Own Labour	-reliable -enjoyable; farming by choice	-often not earning a livable wage -working off-farm distraction from farm work -long hours; always work to be done

This table is not an exhaustive list of all the strengths and weaknesses discussed during the interviews; rather it highlights the common perceptions and experiences regarding each of the primary labour options. Some of the attributes may read as neutral, however, they have been drawn from discussions focused on the positive and negative aspects of each labour force. As a result of farmers' own definitions, these attributes have been divided accordingly.

As can be seen above, the use of migrant workers as a labour option is the only option one with more strengths than weaknesses. Overall, the farmers in this study look more favourably upon paid labour (whether Canadian workers or migrant workers) having experienced greater dedication and believing they can ask more of paid workers; however, intern workers are the only labour option where educating new farmers is seen as a strength. Intern workers and Canadian workers both have many negative descriptors, primarily highlighting a lack of commitment and lack of skill. Another observed trend is that although the farmers enjoy their work, they are often not earning a livable wage and are working many hours on farm. A greater summary of each of these labour options will be given with an analysis on page sixty-two.

Chapter 3: The Farm Labour Debate

What is 'Just Labour'?[9]

Not surprisingly, there are many different ideas on what constitutes just work. This has led to competing views on what is just or equitable within the workplace. Rather than a definable end goal, I would suggest just labour is a fluid term with many factors to consider at various moments in time. Much of the literature around achieving more just conditions within the workplace is extremely liberal and idealistic; however, reviewing these assumptions presents the opportunity to recognize the dominant views and suggest realistic goals for moving forward.

According to Jackson (2010), good jobs refer to jobs that meet criteria for decreasing worker vulnerabilities and strengthening labour markets. He suggests that the criteria are to be outlined by government, employers and employees and weighted equally. However, identifying criteria from these perspectives is complicated and varies depending on various doctrines. For example, policies and programs espoused by the Canadian government, regarding jobs, often support deregulation and employer interests (Foster, 2012). For this reason, academics, such as Foster, have described the Canadian government as operating based on a neoliberal agenda, which promotes both the flexibilization of labour and just-in-time production across the labour market, ignoring the interests of employees.

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[9] This section is based off of a paper I completed as partial requirement in Environmental Policy II: ENVS 6178 for Mark Winfield in spring 2013

The emphasis on satisfying employer interests in Canada, across multiple sectors, demands a deeper comprehension of employer values. When seeking a labour force, there are several factors that employers identify as important. The most common criteria is based on maintaining conditions that allow them to be competitive (Elgersma, 2007). This is often realized by utilizing the lowest cost of labour through keeping wages low or replacing labour with mechanization (Satzewich, 1991). Employers also seek flexibility in being able to quickly fill short term and temporary labour needs (Foster, 2012; Government of Canada, 2012). Additionally, employers seek qualified workers who have the required skill and experience to perform well on the job (Elgersma, 2007). Researchers have also found that many employers identified the importance of "soft skills". This primarily includes a good attitude, loyalty to the employer and job, and a willingness to work as instructed (Martin, 2010). In relation to the prevailing flexibilization of labour, the soft skills indicated by employers in this study signify worker compliance rather than interpersonal or creative attributes that also are associated with "soft skills".

Although there is an emphasis on employer interests within the literature, as a result of neoliberal policies and programs, trends toward declining quality of work from the perspective of employees have been observed. Many researchers argue that job quality assessments should be conducted largely from the perspective of the employee (Jackson, 2010). Income, and more specifically, a livable wage, is one of the primary considerations for an employee seeking work (Chow, 2011). Employees seek jobs where no additional income support is necessary to be able to afford

necessities (Ivanova, 2011). However, income is only one of many factors that influence how individuals choose work.

Beyond a livable wage, job security (ideally permanent work), and benefits are important to employees. This allows them to plan for the long term without worry about losing their employment (Anderson & Ruhs, 2010). People also seek jobs that provide opportunities for personal development and training, as well as the possibility for promotion or progression (Lucas & Mansfield, 2010; Martin, 2010). Pursuing opportunities for advancement is linked to the desire for a job with social status.

Social considerations play a role in how people choose work. This includes factors such as an allowance for social interaction and positive relations with co-workers, limited hours of work, and being close to home (Martin, 2010; Martin, Martin & Weil, 2006). There is also a strong desire among employees to have a positive relationship with employers (Lucas & Mansfield, 2010). A majority of workers in these studies reported wanting interesting and personally rewarding work. One study found 72% of workers listed a healthy and safe workplace as being "very important" and 62% were in favour of a positive work-life balance (as cited in Jackson, 2010). Overall, the most commonly noted and overarching criteria for people to be satisfied with employment are: earning a livable wage; job security and benefits; opportunities for development and training; positive relationships with employers and coworkers; a work-life balance; and a safe and healthy workplace.

It is commonly argued a good job should strive to balance the above mentioned criteria; however, societal power imbalances make this an impossible

task. Additionally, there exist competing views on what is just with regard to labour and the fluidity of different times and workplaces make it difficult to clearly define. For instance, in attempting to remain competitive, in a global economy increasingly built upon neoliberal principles, employers may offer low wages that do not satisfy employees' desires for a livable wage. The precarious employment that has ensued in Canada as a result of heightened emphasis on employer desires for low-cost, flexible and vulnerable labour is certainly not just. Although it is easier to demonstrate unjust labour, workers, activists and researchers must continue their attempts to define just labour within the current moment to suggest steps toward a desirable end goal that may be worked towards. Recognizing the precariousness of employers in smaller business, like small-scale farms, in addition to workers, and seeking cross-sector alliances offers an example of a suggested step towards more just labour conditions for all.

Defining the Farm Labour Debate

As discussed above, under the section *Labour Options*, farmers have differing views on farm labour and what works best for their operation. These variations are likely impacted not only by personal experience, but also by the agriculture industry, the Canadian government, societal views and employees. These perspectives that help shape the farm labour debate will be briefly described below.

Industry and the Canadian Government

Industry and the Canadian government are far too connected in relation to farm labour and therefore will be discussed together. Mysyk (2002) argues that farmers and farm labourers are secondary to government interests, that primarily support the interests of agribusiness. In addition to impacting government research and policy development, agribusinesses are vertically integrated into our food system, posing many challenges for smaller-scale farmers. What little attention is given to farm labour is primarily directed at helping employers keep labour costs low, rather than protecting workers. By maintaining limited agricultural labour protections and expanding temporary foreign worker programs governments have kept farm labour costs low. Even still, labour occupies a large percentage of farm operating costs. Labour cost-saving techniques are thus seen as critical to maintaining a profit. Governments and industry argue that by reducing labour costs, efficiency and productivity can be increased offering a greater return for farmers (Wiebe, 2012).

Mechanization is promoted as improving speed and volume, supporting gene suppression, and controlling environments and inputs (Wiebe, 2012). An additional benefit to mechanization is that it offers uniformity in products, a trait now expected from consumers. It is also argued that it reduces cost variability. In the U.S. the mechanization of raisin crop harvesting increased from 1% in 2000 to 45% in 2007. Additionally, it is estimated 70-80% of baby leaf lettuce is mechanically harvested (Calvin & Martin, 2010). A study by Lui et al (2013) compared farm inputs and various sizes of machinery as cost-effective substitutes for labour to

assist with policy making. They found fertilizer and large-machinery to be the most productive substitute for labour. Similar studies are presented on a wide scale to Canadian farmers.

In addition to seeking alternatives to labour, attention paid to farm labour by governments has focused on how to 'advance' farm workers into higher wage work in the job market. This assumes a hierarchy within the job market, through which workers may advance, and places farm labour at the bottom. Part of this hierarchy perpetuates assumptions that farm labour does not require real skill, devaluing the knowledge and skill required in farming. The other part of focusing on 'advancing' farm workers is based on assumptions that conditions and economic returns for farm labourers cannot be improved; therefore workers should be advanced through the labour market rather than improving farm labour conditions (Findeis, 2002).

Older documents, however, presented an alternative message. For example, the Ontario Department of Agriculture (ODA) released a document in 1969 recognizing the struggle of hiring qualified workers on dairy farms. Employees were interviewed to determine what factors they find important when pursuing a farm job. Based on the results, the ODA proposed employers recognize the factors employees highlight as important, such as wages, housing and hours of work per day. They further suggested increased attention on long-term solutions for acquiring labour by offering conditions and pay comparable to similar jobs in other sectors, such as factories. This suggestion was not adopted and instead the belief that farm labour must be minimized and remain at the bottom of an assumed labour market hierarchy, is the common assumption of government and industry.

Society

Media networks have begun to run stories pertaining to farm labour in recent years. Primarily focusing on migrant agricultural workers, stories have been run in mainstream newspapers, radio and television outlets across the country. The stories focus on a variety of topics, including an exposure of farms offering terrible conditions for workers[10], which sometimes result in worker injuries and deaths[11]. Issues pertaining specifically to migrant agricultural worker programs are also gaining some presence in mainstream media[12]. Some of the sources include The Toronto Star, CBC, The Huffington Post. Much of the information being discussed in the media is only a surface level analysis or a misrepresentation of farm labour that fails to critically examine and educate the general public, in particular about the broader global economic context and systemic inequities; however, activists and alternative sources (such as Rabble and Briar Patch) have been writing pieces in an attempt to challenge to dominant ideologies persistent in the media.

The majority of the articles run focus on the negative or precarious aspects of being a farm worker, presenting a negative social image of farm work. This is not surprising, given that farm labour remains near the bottom of the occupational

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[10] For example, see *Migrant Workers Seek Better Conditions on Farms* at: http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/migrant-workers-seek-better-working-conditions-on-farms/article4649494/ original access April 12, 2014

[11] For example, see *Farm worker loses arm in accident, two others badly injured* at: http://www.sunnewsnetwork.ca/sunnews/canada/archives/2013/11/20131130-091416.html original access April 12, 2014

[12] For example, see *Canada's migrant farm worker system- what works and what's lacking* at: http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/canada-s-migrant-farm-worker-system-what-works-and-what-s-lacking-1.1142489 original access April 12, 2014

hierarchy in Canada and is one of the least protected and lowest paid occupations (Findeis et al, 2002; Preibisch, 2012). Farm work is regarded as a low-skill occupation and is rarely promoted as a viable career option. Jim discussed in detail how this impacts our societal views surrounding farm labour:

> I think farming is really looked at as you do farming if you can't do anything else, and you just do labour. It's not seen as a, definitely not up there with a lawyer, you know what I mean? Just in people's general perspective… there is the perception that it's like the worst job to do, as a labourer, or there is no future in it… So I think getting more Canadians to farm is changing the perception around farming and what it means to farm or be a farmer. Because it's not currently seen as a viable career option. If you ask a career counselor in high school, how many kids here are thinking about farming? Or do you even mention it? Are there any courses here geared towards farming? On career days are there any farmers here? I never heard about it when I was in high school and it's never seen as an option, right? And I think that ties into people not wanting to work on farms.

Farm Workers

Farm workers' voices are underrepresented in discussions on farm labour. Many agricultural labourers have trouble finding work elsewhere in the market due to lower levels of education, low recognition of job skills and limited English (Faraday, 2012). In addition to the challenges of finding alternative work many constraints are placed on agricultural workers to prevent them from speaking out, including the very real threat of losing their job. As a result, many farm workers are in precarious positions and unable to contribute to this debate.

Certain academics and activists have attempted to address this void by drawing greater attention to the issues facing farm workers. Many of those dedicated to advocating for farm workers rights argue that current governmental

policy and legislation pertaining to agriculture ensures a framework where agricultural labour is dominated by workers from the economic margins (Faraday, 2012). Findeis et al (2002) argue these conditions are not likely to change due to the current global political economy that maintains a pool of workers that have limited options other than to accept work in substandard conditions. This pool of workers is maintained by drawing on global populations of workers in countries with much lower wage structures to come to Canada through migrant worker programs that offer limited mobility within the labour market. Conditions are not likely to change for any form of farm labour while programs are available that do not challenge agribusinesses that offer low pay and poor conditions (Findeis, 2002). As a result, high rates of temporary foreign workers in agriculture reinforce the vulnerability of all farm workers, as farmers struggling to maintain their business are dependent upon vulnerable workers to remain competitive.

Research and activism focusing on farm workers is conducted not only by academics, but also by organizing bodies and dedicated activists as well. In particular, in Ontario, Justicia for Migrant Workers (J4MW) is a phenomenal organization that works to promote the rights of migrant farm workers and farm workers without status. J4MW advocates for workers rights, educates the general public on migrant worker issues and works to create spaces for workers to be able to advocate for themselves. J4MW was formed in 2002 and operates at the grassroots level by dedicated volunteers in close relationship with workers[13].

[13] For more information on J4MW, please visit: http://www.justicia4migrantworkers.org/

The United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) works to advocate on behalf of agricultural workers. The union has been engaged with campaigns to increase workplace safety and unionize farm labour. Through the Agricultural Workers Alliance (AWA), UFCW works to support all agricultural workers with improving workplace and housing conditions, and compensation claims, as a few examples[14]. J4MW and UFCW are examples of organizations advocating for farm workers rights, fighting for legislative change and taking cases to tribunal[15]. Others are engaged in similar work aimed at reducing the vulnerability of farm workers that would allow their voices to be included in the farm labour debate. These efforts often occur in a smaller, more localized capacity and focus on specific issues, such as farm worker health.

Analyzing Farm Labour Options [16]

The majority of data and research available pertaining to farm labour is concerned with migrant labour for larger farming operations. In addition to highlighting the differences in scale, it has been an important objective of this study to separate out the various forms of labour on farms. However, some overarching

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[14] For more information on UFCW and AWA, please visit: http://www.ufcw.ca/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2003&Itemid=245&lang=en

[15] Although both UFCW and J4MW are working to advocate for farm workers rights, there is a fundamental difference in their approaches. UFCW is larger and more bureaucratic which provides access to greater funds and resources, while J4MW has a key focus on empowering workers and providing education with a critical focus.

[16] The first part of this section is based on a paper written for coursework in Environmental Law ENVS 5061 submitted to Allan Greenbaum in November 2012

generalizations of farm work will first be made before addressing and critically examining the various labour forces introduced in the section *Farm Labour Options*.

There are many qualities of farm work that make it an unappealing occupation for those who possess mobility within the labour market. Farm work continues to make top ten lists of the most dangerous jobs in the country, typically following only mining and logging (Otero & Preibisch, 2010; CLC, 2011). According to the Canadian Agricultural Injury Reporting's 2008 report, agriculture has the highest absolute number of workplace fatalities with an annual average of 104 deaths per year between 1990 and 2008. Further, a study by Hansen and Donohue in 2003 found the average life expectancy in the United States (US) was 75 years, while the life expectancy for migrant and seasonal farm workers in the US was 49 years (cited in Otero & Preibisch, 2010).

Rather than increasing protections for agricultural workers due to the dangerous nature of the occupation, Canadian policies and laws instead offer several exemptions. For instance, certain protections and incentives applicable in most other occupations do not apply or are modified for agricultural workers. This includes the maximum hours of work, vacation pay, over-time pay, and rest periods (Hanley, 2009). In addition, in terms of collective bargaining abilities, in 2002 in Ontario the Agricultural Employment Protection Act was implemented providing agricultural workers the freedom to associate for the first time, but not to collectively bargain or negotiate with employers (AWA, 2012).

The legal exemptions for farm workers are justified based on the nature of the occupation. Agricultural workers often work inconsistent and long hours, in

variable climates. The work is often monotonous and physically exhausting (Preibisch & Encalada Grez, 2010). Satzewich (1991) describes farm employment as being characterized by low wages, poor and unsafe conditions, long hours, a lack of protection under provincial labour standards legislation, and an absence of habitable accommodations. In the year 2000, agricultural workers received lower pay than any other low-skilled occupation, with the exception of childcare workers (Tucker, 2006). Additionally approximately 40% of all agricultural jobs are seasonal and offer low job security (Faraday, 2012).

With such bleak conditions and protections, the shortage of farm labour comes as no surprise. In 1931 31.7% of Canadians lived on farms and in 2006 2.2% of Canadians lived on farms (Stats Canada, 2014). Canadian Agriculture Human Resource Council (CAHRC) (2009) estimated that in 2008 we were expected to see general labour needs increase across Canada by 15%, with the most dramatic need, 52%, occurring in horticulture. Employers surveyed by CAHRC (2009) identified recruiting and maintaining Canadian employees as increasingly difficult with competition from other industries and the ever-shrinking rural labour pool. The challenges of retaining workers result in part from the location of farms being inaccessible by transit, a socially negative bias towards farm work, and government programs (Employment Insurance and Social Assistance) that do not support the seasonal work of farming. The many barriers to recruiting and retaining local labour, combined with farmers' need for human labour, has led some employers to become increasingly dependent on migrant worker programs (CHC Grower Data, 2003).

The challenges for farm employers requiring labour is evident; however, as discussed above choices regarding farm labour are often aimed at increasing productivity and competitiveness. Due to the cost-price squeeze many agricultural employers argue if they were to improve conditions to attract workers with labour mobility, they would not be able to survive (Basok, 2002). Other challenges, discussed in the chapter *Farming Challenges and Farm Labour Options*, lead many to recognize labour is one of the few remaining ways for farm employers to control their profit margins (Preibisch, 2010). The high costs of labour, in this study up to 75% of total operating costs, further demonstrates the need for a workforce that supports farmers. The difficulties acquiring labour and the various labour options need to be appropriately recognized in discussions regarding the growth in demand for local, sustainable food.

In the previous chapter, *Farming Challenges and Farm Labour Options,* farmers' experiences with various labour forces were presented. Many farmers in this study have not used all forms of labour, yet they offered their opinions or assumptions about certain labour forces, in addition to actual experiences. Their responses can be used to encourage dialogue surrounding farm labour and to challenge certain interpretations or biases. An analysis of farmers' experiences with various farm labour forces encourages us to reflect on the way we consider labour and educate ourselves on alternative understandings. By offering a critical lens, the following analysis of each farm labour option begins to break down biased assumptions and recognize a common experience of vulnerability between farmers

and farm workers within the greater context of neoliberal agricultural and labour policies.

Intern Workers

A farm intern is defined as "a person who agrees to trade labour on a farm in exchange for a learning experience in farm management" (McKissick, date unknown, page 1). Interns are often compensated for their labour in-kind, such as through a stipend, housing and/or food. The farmers in this study who hire interns all provide food and a weekly or monthly stipend, as well as the transfer of farming-specific knowledge. Many also provide accommodation. The farmers find their interns by advertising online or advertising through a network of collaborating farmers seeking interns.

As noted in the previous chapter three farms are in the process of moving away from internships, one has reduced the number of internships and intends to be more selective, and one farm has completely moved away from the intern model and will not use it any more. Opinions on internships provided by the farmers in this study are varied, although the common belief is they provide lower labour costs and farmers recognize the importance of providing knowledge and education; however, there are many challenges with this labour option.

The challenges to hiring interns discussed by farmers include: a lack of continuity between seasons, sharing of personal space, interns being unreliable or a threat of interns quitting, and a large investment in training and supervision. Although the financial costs of interns may be lower, there are still costs associated with room and board and the social costs that go into maintaining an intern labour

force. Rachel said of internships, "it's not a fair situation, I don't think it's illegal, but I do think it's unfair and unjust…" This is a sentiment currently being explored of internships more generally across the labour market, but is not shared by all of the farmers.

As with many labour policies, regulations of internships cross many jurisdictions. In Canada, they are mostly regulated at the provincial level, but are typically excluded from provincial Employment Standards Codes. This exemption is a result of internships typically being considered part of an academic program (Baetu, 2013). According to the Ontario Employment Standards Act, intern employees are entitled to minimum wage, but may work for no pay if they are receiving training and meet the following six conditions (Canadian Intern Association, 2014):

> 1) The training is similar to that which is given in a vocational school.
> 2) The training is for the benefit of the intern. You receive some benefit from the training, such as new knowledge or skills.
> 3) The employer derives little, if any, benefit from the activity of the intern while he or she is being trained.
> 4) Your training doesn't take someone else's job.
> 5) Your employer isn't promising you a job at the end of your training.
> 6) You have been told that you will not be paid for your time
> (Service Ontario, 2014)

Based on these six conditions, it is possible to interpret farm internships for no pay as illegal; however, this is highly contestable. This is a very understudied labour force and there are unique factors with regard to farming. Sam expressed the farm internship dilemma in detail:

> When it's not just for pay; you get people who are more serious and are there to learn and build skills and the coin that's changing hands is the knowledge. I think the other intern issues that are happening in other

> companies are quite different because they don't have those other realities of farming. Like in the industries, it's quite different and, I think maybe, there is more abuse happening there, but I think the intern programs that have developed on farms is for a whole different reason because our agricultural capacity has broken down, we are at about 10% self-sufficiency in Ontario. We have to rebuild our capacity on our farms, and some young people recognize this, many are opposed to the conventional food system and really want to step in and get back to the land, not like the back to the landers. But I think there is a bit more knowledge happening now and the farm internships are a great way to build that knowledge.

Especially with regard to the growing attention to internships across sectors, this is a labour force worth exploring further. With minimal statistics on internships, there is concern they are driving down wages across the labour market. The question of internships on farms is worth considering with regard to the belief that there are not people willing to work on farms. The surplus in interest from individuals seeking farm internships contradicts this common assumption and presents a dilemma; suggesting, on the one hand, that farm interns are being favoured as a form of cheap labour, and, on the other hand, that there is a need to educate more people about farming and encourage another generation of farmers.

As internships on farms continue to be explored, there are two primary areas worthy of attention. The first is the dependence small-scale farmers seem to have on interns, especially during the early years. The second is the language used by farmers that emphasizes the importance of internships educating new farm*ers*, rather than farm *workers*. This especially suggests a need to speak with interns to see if their reasons for pursing an internship align with farmers assumptions that a percentage of interns intend to start their own farm; there may be reasons beyond learning farm skills, such as gaining transferable skills, working in an outdoor

setting, or a lack of work options that are instead attracting people to these positions.

Canadian Workers

As stated in the previous chapter, farmers' experiences with Canadian workers were the most contested of all the labour options. Many of the responses suggested conflict between a desire to hire locally and negative experiences hiring Canadian workers. Jack was the only one to directly link the need for Canadian workers to the notion of sustainability,

> I don't think it's sustainable to have a whole agricultural system like we do in Ontario, at least in vegetable production, that's based on labour that's flown in from thousands of kilometers away. So, maybe it would be ideal if we could find this kind of labour force locally, but it's hard for me to see how that's going to happen in the foreseeable future.

To Jack, part of the difficulty finding local labour is, "there is such a stigma against [doing] hard, physical labour in Canada."

Others shared Jack's difficulty envisioning a local labour force. Jim said, "a lot of it is people don't want to go out there and work in the hot sun and bust ass for twelve hours a day for $10, or whatever minimum wage is. And farms would have a hard time paying more than that." Jim was not the only one who mentioned the hard work for little pay. Jay stated, "anyone who knows a little bit about farming will say 'well why should I work for you?' They may start their own little farm." This sentiment may be tied into the increase of internships available on small- and medium-scale farms. Canadians who are interested in farming, and are privileged enough to be able to intern, are likely to try this option and gain education and

experience with the desire of starting their own farm rather than, as Jim put it, "bust ass" for minimum wage.

Another belief expressed regarding Canadian workers is the idea that they would rather collect unemployment insurance. Suzanne expressed this belief in the following statement, "I mean I guess it doesn't help when people say 'oh that's all? I can get more on unemployment'. I mean we are fighting for the same pool of people with the unemployment services of the government, that just doesn't make sense." Unfortunately, the seasonal nature of farm work does not align with government assistance programs, one of the many failings of regulatory issues facing precarious workers (Bernstein et al, 2006). And, as some farmers acknowledged, the wages they are able to offer do not provide a living wage. Therefore, unless Canadian workers are able to find employment on the off-season, working as a farm worker is not a viable career and workers likely do not qualify for assistance to support them through the off-season. This does support Suzanne's argument that Canadians may instead prefer to collect government assistance, but rather than blaming the individual, demands an alignment of services that better support workers and seasonal occupations.

Discussions pertaining to hiring locally risk feeding xenophobia. For example Glen's comment that he would prefer "[s]omeone local that we can work with and that is going to be Canadian and contribute back to the Canadian economy" risks 'othering' migrant workforces and posing an 'us' versus 'them' mentality. Although this is a significant topic, for the purposes of this study, separating farm labour allows a deeper exploration of both the challenges and desired attributes of farm

workers. Glen continued, "[i]t's a crutch, a cheat to hire temporary foreign workers" instead highlighting the argument that migrant worker programs are seen as a form of agriculture subsidy.

Yet not everyone shared Glen's desires to hire locally. Those who expressed favouring Canadian workers have not hired migrant workers. Two out of the four farmers hiring migrant workers would hire locally if they could, but still prefer migrant workers to Canadian workers. This is likely a result of migrant workers unfree status, an argument that will be elaborated upon below, as well as the shared belief that Canadian workers are unproductive, threaten to or do quit, and have a lack of experience, strength, efficiency and mobility. These experiences are likely impacted by the lack of farm training opportunities and the fact that those with labour mobility in the Canadian labour market will choose not to remain in jobs that demand a lot for little return.

Gabriella's complete Canadian workforce presents an alternative model. She wrote,

> [f]inding good labourers is always a challenge, but we have managed to get a good crew together with most of them returning the following season. We pay our employees above minimum wage with the expectation that they will put in the time and effort to earn it and keep their position open for the next season. We also treat them all with respect and deliver drinks and make sure they're fed (amazing how many forget their lunches).

Windy Ridge is an established farm that, unique to this study, offers pick-your-own and various value added products. According to Gabriella, "Labour includes: planting, picking, weeding, irrigation, cash, bakery prep, food prep, baking, ordering, stocking, tractor wagon driving, field management etc." Highlighting

Windy Ridge as an alternative model is not to suggest the farmers unable to attract a Canadian worker force do not respect their workers, rather to demonstrate when an employer is able to offer conditions above the minimum requirements (including, for example, variation in tasks and higher pay), they are more likely to find a satisfactory workforce. Another significant factor allowing Windy Ridge to hire locally is that many of their employees are their children and children's friends; having a rural network reduces the challenges of housing and transportation that many farms face when seeking workers.

Migrant Workers[17]

Based on the interviews, there are several shared beliefs associated with migrant workers. Many of the farmers' experiences and assumptions about migrant farm workers have been discussed by various academics and activists as common understandings of the program in need of further analysis. For instance, there are several misconceptions or generalizations about migrant workers that have been widely accepted. Beliefs expressed in this study in need of further analysis include:

- that migrant workers are professional agricultural workers
- they want to come to Canada to work and to work as many hours as possible
- they do not mind working extra hours here because they rest when they are not in Canada
- migrant workers are considered a farm subsidy because their wages are subsidized by sending governments
- abuse and exploitation of migrant workers is rare and it is possible and easy for migrant workers to transfer to new farms if they are placed in unfavourable conditions.

[17] I would like to acknowledge that the analysis of migrant labour is much longer and more detailed than the other forms of labour. This is based on the greater amount of literature and the greater amount of time I have spent exploring this labour force.

By discussing these assumptions and demonstrating alternative interpretations we may begin to dismantle how agriculture in Ontario is so dependent on migrant workers. As with the other categories of labour forces, we cannot fully assess the beliefs listed above due to the lack of inclusion of migrant workers' voices and the fact that this is a workforce and comprised of individuals with various experiences while working in Canada. Nonetheless, we can begin to dissect these generalizations through the exploration of migrant worker program conditions in Ontario and factors that cause people to migrate for work.

The fear of workers leaving mid-season was prominent in the discussions on Canadian workers and interns. Yet this power is greatly minimized, if not eliminated, when workers are easily replaced and when conditions do not allow workers freedom in the labour market (Wood, Ostry & Zaidi, 1973). In hiring migrant workers, the power is disproportionately in the hands of the employers, who control the ability for migrants to stay and work in Canada and, in the case of SAWP, return in consecutive years. It is often argued the primary reason for migrant workers to be considered a favourable workforce is the exaggerated power differentials between employers and employees. These power differentials play out in different ways, yet are inevitably the result of a program that has been built on systemic global inequities. Migrant worker programs in Canada depend on relationships with countries that have been systematically positioned, as a result of colonial pasts and present day free trade agreements, to be unable to offer jobs for their citizens. Program conditions in Canada creating an unfree workforce that tie

workers to employers and offers conditional, temporary visas, perpetuate the power differentials at both the country and employer level.

Hiring migrant workers entails additional financial costs[18] compared to interns and Canadian workers; however, the high level of productivity and compliance of workers, as a result of program conditions, provides for a favourable workforce. This is created in part through a high level of worker dependency on the employer, which many farmers regard as outweighing the monetary costs (Satzewich, 1991). This dependency further adds to the power imbalance and affects both work and non-work life. Under SAWP, farmers 'name' workers they deem satisfactory to return the following season. As a result migrant workers have a great incentive to please the farmer so they may return in subsequent years. Additionally, once in Canada migrant agricultural workers are dependent upon farmers for housing and transportation, adding to the creation of an amenable workforce that seeks to please their employer in exchange for favourable treatment. This is demonstrated in part by Jay and Suzanne's answer to the question *what are the benefits of SAWP?* Jay began, "Oh they are very reliable, they work" and Suzanne continued, "they are on site. They are really onsite, they don't have anything else to do besides be here and work."

Being onsite and dependent upon their employers for housing and transportation contributes to the paternalistic treatment of migrant workers. Gray (2014) argues paternalism is unique to smaller scale agriculture where farmers are more likely to be more intimate with their workers and offer benefits beyond the

[18] Depending on the migrant worker program costs may include: housing, transportation and minimum wage requirements

work contract (such as shared meals). Paternalism represents a debt that has no chance of being repaid, but is more valuable than what might be repaid as it results in a compliant workforce (Goodell et al, 1985). Further, the integration of employer and landlord roles provides farmers with an authoritative presence and ability to enforce arbitrary rules that intermingle work and non-work hours (McLaughlin & Hennebry, 2012). The vulnerability of migrant workers is then increased as workers often feel obliged to follow these rules and attempt to repay debts by working harder.

The precarious immigration status of migrant workers is "attractive to the corporate agricultural agenda" by impacting the compliance of migrant workers (Hanley, 2012, page 67). As demonstrated throughout this paper, small- and medium-scale farms are competing against corporate agriculture and labour remains a way to compete. As noted above, by being hyperdependent upon employers for their job, their housing, transportation and communication, the inherent power differential becomes exaggerated in favour of the farmer. Further, flexibility is given to employers as TFWPs allow specific recruiting based on qualities such as gender and nationality that would be illegal in the Canadian labour market. Jay expressed the discrepancy of not being able to recruit based on specific skills,

> We actually requested specific individuals because we want the skills of that person and yet, the liaison service tells us, 'we are sending you unskilled labour'. As far as they are concerned, migrant workers don't have skills…but we can request by name, so once we get to know them.

When hiring migrant agricultural workers, farmers are able to request which gender and nationality they prefer, but not specific skills. Additionally, part of the

requirement for farmers to hire migrant workers is the ability to demonstrate they have not been able to find Canadian workers. Carolyn ties this all together in her statement,

> To hire offshore workers you have to prove that you have advertised the job thoroughly. So we are getting lots of job applications from people who are interested, but no one has any experience yet. So they are sort of missing that part of our job advertisement. And the reason being, you could obviously train to be a field worker, it's not, yah, it's not impossible to learn those skills, but I think our reason for wanting them to have a years experience is to feel confident that they know what they are getting into. Like the guys from Mexico know what they are getting into and they know how to work and there's no chance that they are going to leave, unless something is terrible.

By encouraging farmers to screen Canadian employees, but not migrant workers, the misconception that migrant workers are professional agricultural workers is maintained. Don said of the migrant worker on his farm, "my hired man was a professional farmer from Jamaica." Although migrant workers are screened in sending countries, this screening differs between countries and the process is not made explicitly available to farmers. Many migrant workers do have agricultural experience, but this cannot be accepted as the norm, or that they are familiar with Canadian crops and techniques. It must be acknowledged that the professionalism observed by farmers is a greater reflection on the power imbalances and precarious immigration status than previous experiences or a desire to work in agriculture.

Rather than assuming migrant workers have a desire to come to Canada and work, we must recognize the global inequities that force people to migrate. This was a topic I spent a lot of time discussing with my co-workers from Jamaica. Many were very frustrated knowing that many Canadians believe they preferred to come to

Canada, or that it was a choice. They continuously discussed the lack of work in Jamaica and the lack of governmental support, as a result of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) and international trade agreements, that resulted in loss of land and a lack of jobs that paid enough to support their families. Additionally, many of the migrant agricultural workers I know work in their home country between their stints abroad because they cannot support themselves and their families solely from their earnings in Canada. These realities are not reflected in Carolyn's statement, "And it's only for six months, right, and then they rest for six months." Or Don's assumption, "in most case they go home a rich man. [The migrant worker on his farm] says that in one hour here he makes what he would make in 10 hours working construction in Jamaica. So they go home rich. And he doesn't work all winter." While it may be true that migrant workers returning home might be relatively more well off than others in their community, they may still need to live modestly and work between seasons to make ends meet.

Jim begins to dissect this assumption that migrant workers are paid a living wage:

> If we are taking migrant workers and taking that country's workers, how are we then paying back that country and that community that we are taking those workers from? Because we are, we are taking all of that labour out of there. And it might be argued that you are injecting money into the country, but at the same time, how sustainable is that? It's dependent on foreign people hiring you to sustain that community.

The sustainability of sending countries foreign exchange is a significant consideration. According to the World Bank, in 2010 Mexico was the third remittance-receiving country globally, depending on 22.6 million dollars from remittances. That same year Jamaica was depending on 14 million dollars in

remittances. As Jim suggests the high level of dependence on remittances adds to the precariousness of sending counties, deepening global inequities and posing severe challenges for overcoming poverty.

It has also been acknowledged that migrant worker programs, such as SAWP, purposely create dependency on the program. By paying just enough to slightly improve conditions, the program ensures workers become dependent on the program, rather than allowing them to improve their conditions and advance financially within society. Migrant workers have multiple deductions (for example, employment insurance and the Canadian pension plan) from the minimum and seasonal wages they are offered, with many barriers to benefiting from these deductions. Additionally, while attempting to support their family and save for the off-season, migrant workers are forced to live in poverty in Canada (McLaughlin & Hennebry, 2013).

Other challenges facing migrant workers include leaving their families for extended periods of time, facing racism, and being put into exploitative working conditions. One of the conditions for Mexicans signing up for SAWP is that they must have dependents. Neither SAWP nor the agricultural stream of the TFWP allows family sponsorship or visitations. Since SAWP workers are in Canada for up to eight months, this means being separated from their families for that period of time. This differs slightly for workers hired through the TFWP, as they are employed in Canada for up to two years at a time, often with a brief trip home[19]. The racism that migrant

[19] Recent changes to the TFWP suggest this is changing to a maximum of one year in Canada, likely with no visits home. For more information on these changes, visit:

workers face is deeply entrenched within the program, yet workers may also experience racism in the towns where they work and on their farms. For example, in my personal experience, I have heard workers being called mules, being told to appreciate the bed and fridge they are given access to in Canada because once they return home that luxury will be gone, and Jamaican workers being told to speak proper English.

Eight of the nine farmers in this study reported hearing stories of exploitation on other farms, but believed this was the exception. Jack said,

> I think that there is a common perception that abuse and mistreatment is much more common in Ontario than is actually the case. That's understandable because there are still a few, all of our workers worked on other farms across Ontario for a number of years before they came to work here and some of the stories they have of the working conditions they lived under are terrible, they are awful. But I think that's the exception and, I think that most farmers who have migrant workers are actively working to change that situation.

He continued further on:

> I think the ways the rules are now around the programs, I think it's getting harder for farms to [exploit or mistreat workers], which is a good thing and I think the big majority of farms that I've spoken to who have migrant workers feel the same way that we do, and that's that their migrant workers are an incredible part of their farm business and that they want to do everything they can to make sure they are happy and they are having a good experience and that they are making as much money as possible.

The second quote calls attention to the fact that exploitation is not about individual cases, but rather the program conditions that allow for exploitation to occur. The farmers in this study generally demonstrated a desire to create just conditions for migrant workers on their farms. Further, they are using a labour force that has

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http://www.migrantworkersalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/July-2014-Changes-to-TFWP.pdf

demonstrated to be most effective for their labour requirements. As Jack mentions, "we've tried every kind of labour option out there I think… And then the last two seasons we've hired offshore workers from Mexico and that has been the best model by far."

Summarizing many of the complexities of migrant agricultural worker programs, Jim said:

> If I was a young, single guy in Mexico and I had the opportunity to come to Canada? Yeah, I'd be out of there, because it's dangerous, it's an opportunity to get out and not get caught by a cartel or get caught in the cross-hairs or whatever, a chance to make money. But why, why is it they are in that situation in the first place? I think a lot of people see it as real cut and dry and I don't think it is. I think there's a lot more in depth than that. And you know if I was a, like I was in the situation I am now with a family and kids, I wouldn't want to go to another country and work and not see my family six months out of the year, eight months out of the year. If I could work in my own country and have my own farm and it was possible, even if I'm making less money, I'm sure a lot of people would see that as a viable option. But because of certain trade restrictions, free trade deals and things like that, I think the local economy, especially the agricultural economy, basically had the bottom cut out from under it. People go to the city or they go to be migrant workers and, so I don't know. I think it's possible to have it, a situation where you can have good migrant workers that are well looked after, well regulated, but would the ideal situation be that Canadians work on Canadian farms and Mexicans work on Mexican farms? I don't know. If we could be more fair in our trade then maybe we wouldn't have the need for migrant workers? I don't know it's tough, it's tough.

As 'tough' and complex as it is, it is clear migrant workers in agriculture are here to stay. Historically SAWP was the only avenue for agricultural workers, but since 2002 there has been an avenue for agriculture workers under the name of The Pilot Project for Occupations Requiring Lower Levels of Formal Training (NOC C & D) or, the Pilot Project for short. Since the inception of the Pilot Project, intake has grown from 2 268 workers in 2002 to 15 538 agricultural workers in 2011 (HRSDC, 2012). Under the

Pilot Project, workers may be employed for up to 24 months, in the same industries identified under SAWP (Faraday, 2012). In July 2012, the Pilot Project became institutionalized and the name was changed to the Agricultural Stream of the TFWP. This stream does not include the government-to-government negotiations that occur under SAWP and thus no government has authority over whether employers comply with terms and conditions of employment, making this avenue even more precarious than SAWP (Faraday, 2012). Additionally, recent program amendments attempting to resolve concerns surrounding the entire TFWP excluded agricultural workers. This exemption of agriculture maintains and reinforces the lack of concern and protection for migrant agricultural workers at the program level, institutionalizing unjust working conditions.

Own Labour

Although it is too often overlooked as a farm labour force, famers' own labour, especially on smaller scale farms, is extremely important to include in discussions pertaining to farm labour. The farmers in this study are all working tremendously hard to create and maintain a successful business. Farm work is inherently a seasonal position, however, as was noted in the previous chapter, the farmers work does not end in autumn; each of the farmers, and/or their partners, work off-farm in addition to their work on-farm to support their livelihoods. In recent years, farmers across the sector have increasingly relied on off-farm income, rather than sustaining themselves principally on farming (Findeis, 2002). A study by Alasia et al (2009) found that between 1991 and 2001 the total number of farmers decreased, but the number of farmers working off-farm increased. The authors

found certain factors such as education level, gender, age and number of operators impacted the likelihood of farmers working off-farm; however, regardless of these factors, the three main reasons for working off-farm were added economic security, necessary income and primarily working off-farm with some farm sales.

The huge dependency on off-farm income demonstrates the precarity of farming. Working off-farm was identified by farmers as necessary, but also as a significant distraction that takes time away from focusing on the farm business. Yet, it is evident that farmers invest extraordinary levels of their own labour into the business. In addition to working off-farm to support their business or personal lives, many farmers expressed working unfathomable hours on-farm. Don noted he has put himself in the hospital multiple times with exhaustion, Jack said he tries to limit himself to sixty-six hours a week, and several others expressed their own labour was the only reliable source. The amount of dedication and effort farmers put in to their farms may be indicative of the level of work they expect from their employees. Since they are working so hard and putting in so many hours, this same level of commitment may implicitly be expected of workers.

The changes in agriculture over the past century that have reduced the number of farmers and increased demand for farm workers, also created a social distance between farmers and farm workers (Tucker, 2012). On small- and medium-scale farms the distance is not as great as many of the farmers are working in the fields alongside their employees. Although farmers possess undeniable benefits from being the employers, Canadian citizens, and farm owners, they are still receiving minimal returns for their work. Working off-farm to support their

livelihoods in the off-season suggests many farmers are not making a livable wage off of their farm business. As Jim bluntly put it: "we are making fuck all."

In their chapter discussing food insecurity amongst farm workers in California, Brown and Getz (2011) argue that vulnerability "has been systematically constructed within the political economy of agrarian capital accumulation, immigration politics, and neoliberal trade policy" (page 121). Although this argument highlights farm worker vulnerability as a product of larger systemic issues, the dependence of farmers on precarious work forces must also be recognized as part of this same process. Brown and Getz (2011) continue their argument by highlighting the devaluation of farm labour that must also be linked to our understanding of farmers' own insecurities. By contextualizing challenges for farmers, in addition to recognizing their own labour as a significant portion of farm labour forces, we begin to recognize parallels between their own insecurities and those of other farm labour options.

Supplemental Labour

Different forms of supplemental labour were discussed by farmers throughout the interviews and presented under the section *Farm Labour Options*. The discourse by farmers surrounding wwoofers is similar to that of interns, that some may be useful, but most are a strain on the business as they are temporary and untrained. Wwoofers differ from interns in that they do not receive a stipend, are more temporary and often work fewer hours per day. Volunteers are another temporary labour option, although most farmers utilizing volunteers emphasize the

importance of offering educational experiences and encouraging a relationship with the community, rather than the labour.

The other specific forms of labour discussed by Don, Sam and Jay, although not used on their farms, demonstrate a continuous trend toward a flexible labour force in agriculture. Don discussed at length what he termed roaming crews. His description, presented in the previous chapter, of a ten-person crew that comes to the farm for a day of work at a time, is in line with what Faraday (2012) presents as "jobbers". She writes that the daily cash payments are usually given without deductions and workers are thus essentially undocumented and extremely vulnerable.

Sam's description of the human resources scheme offering 50 Vietnamese workers cannot be confirmed beyond his experience; however, the offer demonstrates the mass expansion of the TFWP and the flexibilization of labour occurring in Canada and globally. The offer of workers being provided to an employer for a month, free of charge, highlights the severe need to monitor the program and ban recruiters[20]. Finally, Jay's idea of a pool of workers that could be called upon when work is available epitomizes the flexibilization of labour. This notion of just-in-time production is arguably the most precarious form of labour. This process exemplifies migrant day labourers who wait in parking lots for employers to choose them based on daily needs. With no form of security or protections, day labourers are extremely vulnerable. With the insecurities of

[20] For more information on recruiters, please see Fay Faraday's report *Profiting From the Precarious: How recruitment practices exploit migrant workers*.

farming and farm work, it is difficult to guarantee hours for workers, yet considerations for workers security must be made.

The Ideal Farm Labour Force

The ideal farm labour force is a fluid concept depending on many of the factors discussed in the *farm labour debate*. Each farm is unique and the labour needs differ accordingly, as can be seen in the farmers' description of labour options and their analysis of the labour options. At any given time, on any given farm what is suitable or required for labour may change; however, by allowing farmers a platform to envision a potentially ideal labour force, activists and workers may have a better understanding of a plausible direction.

When asked what their ideal labour force would be, six of the farmers compared the idea of an ideal labour force to what they currently use. Jack and Don both expressed satisfaction with their current labour, Carolyn said they were getting closer and what they have advertised this year is what they believe to be the ideal labour force. Suzanne said with a few changes they would be almost ideal. Glen said they have not yet found their ideal labour force and Jim expressed it is hard to predict because the business is still growing.

Everyone who answered this question gave examples of specific positions or specific traits that would be ideal. Glen and Suzanne would like a field manager. Carolyn specifically mentioned advertising for extra harvesters, "in case we didn't have everyone else come through because when you really don't have your full labour team come together, that's where it really hurts." Jim hopes to see Old Thyme

Farm eventually hire two full time employees, have three interns, host wwoofers throughout the season and be able to pay himself, his mother and brother for their full time work. Although Don did say his labour force is currently perfect, he admits this depends on the intern each season. Qualities of the ideal labour force that were mentioned by farmers are: productive, hardworking, flexible, reliable, educated and physically able.

The importance of local labour was another theme discussed in relation to the ideal labour force. Rachel said, "I would like to have people who could commute to the farm to work, I would like to be able to pay them $20 an hour to work here." While discussing the ideal positions for Three Sisters Farm, Glen said, "ideally those would be local people that we can afford to pay well enough that they can survive all year long. And they don't have to work cleaning hotel rooms or whatever, so they've got a sustainable lifestyle. That's the ideal."

Although hiring local and offering a livable wage was identified by some, the farmers who expressed being the most satisfied with their current labour force are employing migrant workers. Jack's answer demonstrates his struggle, as someone who is dependent upon migrant workers, defining an ideal farm labour force:

> It would look, it would look, that's a tough question! Our labour force right now is fantastic. They're amazing, incredibly productive and hardworking. I'm not sure what an ideal labour force would look like. The thing that's nice about the labour force right now is that it's very flexible. Like they, the guys we have, want to work as many hours as possible. So if it's pouring rain one day and there is not a lot to get done, they are very happy to not work and then the next day make up for it by working a really long day, if it's better conditions or whatever. And if there is ever a situation where we need to work two weeks straight just to catch up, they're happy to do it. They're psyched to do it. So in that case the labour force we have right now is really ideal. I mean part of our focus on sustainability, I don't think it's sustainable to have a whole

> agricultural system like we do in Ontario, at least in vegetable production, that's based on labour that's flown in from thousands of kilometers away. So, maybe it would be ideal if we could find this kind of labour force locally, but it's hard for me to see how that's going to happen in the foreseeable future.

Achieving the Ideal Labour Force

Although an ideal labour force is a contentious notion, it helps frame future directions. Additionally, by including farmers in the brainstorming processes of how to achieve an ideal labour force, collaboration becomes more feasible. When asked how their ideal labour force might be achieved, suggestions for achieving the ideal labour force were primarily tied to the systemic challenges for small- and medium-scale, sustainable farmers. It is generally assumed finding ways to overcome these barriers and raising farm earnings more will result in being able to offer more paid positions on farms, more competitive wages and improved conditions.

Jim and Jack both called to attention the price of food, suggesting if we are to achieve an ideal labour force, consumers would have to pay more. Jack ties the price of food into competition with imported vegetables. He said:

> Our direct competitors are out of California and in California the labour system is so much worse than it is here. They are paying much lower wages, a lot of undocumented workers…our product is already substantially more expensive than theirs. So the only way we compete is on freshness and quality…So unless you've got a level playing field in terms of labour standards, I don't see how it works.

Sam's answer was tied to this, wishing that "more of the income and the profits in the food system [went back to farmers] instead of being lost in the corporate spin off cycles." Beyond these specific suggestions, changing the global food system was identified as important by others, but was not discussed in a substantial way.

In addition to mentioning the need to change global food systems and corporate concentration, more local solutions were also given. Rachel tied government regulations and quotas into the ability for Sunshine Valley to potentially employ more people, maybe even on a year round basis. She said:

> Government regulations around quotas and around, I guess mostly around food safety regulations that prevent us from marketing products that we would like to be marketing. For example keeping more hens, raising meat chickens, selling milk. All of these things we would consider to be, maybe not our entire farm revenue, but pieces of the pie that could contribute to a more sustainable operation that we are currently not permitted to be retailing or to be selling or producing at a scale…. I have constant demand for all of those things and none of which I can meet the demand. So profitability, there is a huge piece for us to become more viable and more profitable would be to open up those markets.

Glen would like to see "more leniency in the bureaucracy to appreciate and support smaller, sustainable farms, and less emphasis on big farms."

More direct solutions were also offered. Rachel and Jim suggested wage subsidies or government incentive programs to assist with the cost of hiring locally. Rachel responded, "Wage subsidies would be a great way to [allow for our ideal labour force]. It would allow us, and I don't expect a wage subsidy for my wage per say, but it would allow us to recruit and retain better workers if there was a bit of an incentive for us to pay more." In a similar line, Glen and Jim also supported the idea of more general subsidies for sustainable farmers that would support making their farms more efficient or provide greater infrastructure[21]. This was seen as another way to increase income, therefore increasing their ability to pay for labour.

[21] Although it was not explicitly mentioned, I assume based on conversation, these subsidies would come from provincial or federal governments

Beyond food system barriers, farmers also discussed a relationship between the overarching societal relationship to work and challenges in acquiring the ideal farm labour force. Jay said,

> We don't value work…work should almost be a pleasure…if we had that kind of an attitude toward work maybe that would change. Instead we go large scale, we think that the mechanization is going to make our life much easier and much better. We go capital intensive instead of labour intensive. It doesn't have to be hard; you can really enjoy working on a farm. We have enough knowledge now that we can produce in a better way.

This relates to societal views of farm work not being a viable or decent career choice. Jay suggests changing this mindset through educating youth in schools about farm jobs. He also suggested promoting farming as a healthy lifestyle as a way to change this view and making farm work more appealing.

Chapter 4: Including Farmers' Voices in the Farm Labour Debate

Engaging Farmers in Labour Movements

One of the research questions overarching this research is *what possibilities exist for collaboration between food and labour movements?* Having included farmers' voices on the many farm level challenges and labour challenges, we may now explore the possibility of including farmers in collaboration across the food and labour movements; however, many farmers expressed they are too busy to engage in labour movements or that it is not currently a priority. Glen articulately presented his answer:

> How many crosses shall we bear? Um, at the moment it's not high on our priority to be proponents or community leaders in this area. We've got enough on our plate of challenges, what we will do is try and treat our employee partners as best as we can afford to. Striving always of course to give them a viable career, to become advocates whatever, maybe in the future, but not right now.

Other farmers were also reluctant to join labour efforts. Jim explained how the stereotypical conservativism of farmers who supports less government interference may relate to farmers' willingness to support labour efforts:

> It's a fine line too because farmers like their independence; so the more government gets involved farmers are like, 'oh, don't come up in my shit, I'm a farmer I'm independent, I don't want the government poking it's nose and getting involved', right?

Carolyn took this further this by saying:

> As soon as there is an organization or a union involved it is sort of scary for the employer because everybody has a different understanding of what's fair, but I would suspect that any motions put forth by organizations would be in line with our values, so I don't see why we wouldn't support those activities... The efforts of activists to have high

> standards, if we are meeting those standards already it shouldn't be a threat to me, but for some reason having another party involved in regulating things… I mean are you aware of conversations that are happening between farmers and [labour] activists? Not really. Probably most see it as a threat, right? If they are not providing great conditions it's just a threat to what is already an uphill battle to make a go of farming. Maybe we can provide another model? The small farmer, the ecological farmer because it seems there is most interest in farms like us…

Carolyn's suggestion for another model is something that was discussed by others when brainstorming ways for increasing collaboration between the food and labour movements. Other proposals were given to raise the profile of farming. Rachel suggested by educating and informally recruiting they are encouraging their workers and the people they work with to consider farming as a career option. She suggests supporting organizations that are working to support new farmers, such as FarmStart and the Ecological Farmers of Ontario (EFAO) that could help with both farm labour training and educating the public on issues pertaining to farm labour. Jim also believes raising awareness of farmers and educating the public on food production is necessary to addressing farm labour:

> As a general population we are just so distanced from our food system and our agricultural system that people don't understand it. So I think there is the misperception about it and people just don't understand what it's like to be a farmer. It's something I want to bring up with the NFU; I think that's something we really need to do as an organization is get out there and say 'this is who we are, this is what we do'.

Jim has many other ideas for engaging food activists around labour issues including: having an organization or government liaison organize farm internships, exploring ways to make migrant worker programs more temporary for workers rather than having so many individuals dependent upon the program for multiple years

(perhaps by setting up co-ops in sending countries), raising the social value and the costs of food, and addressing the income gap so it is easier for people to afford good food. Frieda and Glen suggested being able to vote for political parties addressing positive labour practices. Finally, Sam suggests that social media could be used by organizations like Local Food Plus (LFP)[22] that consider the actual economic, social and environmental situations to ensure transparency.

Although there were several suggestions for ways to build alliances between food and labour movements, no one was extremely enthusiastic to spearhead any of these ideas. There was general agreement amongst those interviewed that they are able to control labour conditions on their farm and they have personal goals of operating above the minimum standards. Addressing unjust farm labour beyond their farm gate is not seen as a priority. Farmers are too busy surviving within the complex food system, where the current disconnect between labour and food is preventing collaboration and action.

Naming the Farm Labour Moment

Throughout this paper there has been an attempt to better understand the current conjuncture of both agriculture and labour, with an emphasis on farmers'

[22] In the spring of 2014 LFP entered a "transitional phase" and is no longer in operation. I believe this speaks to the challenges facing alternative food certifiers tasked with presenting the public with a more critical and equitable lens for making food choices. For a summary describing LFP's "new chapter", visit http://landfoodpeople.ca/ (copied on July 5, 2014)

perspectives. This exploratory study provided a platform for farmers' voices in order to gain an understanding of how farmers fit in this current juncture.
By identifying the conjuncture, or how the different forces have come together, and naming the farm labour moment, it may be possible to better appreciate why farmers are so dependent on vulnerable workers. The current farm labour conjuncture is greatly influenced by the inequities present at various levels of the global food system. Upon reflection, the average estimation for labour as a percentage of total operating costs was 35%. Since the labour option greatly affects the costs, exploring and experimenting with various labour options is necessary to successful farm businesses.

During the interviews, the greatest challenges to farming sustainably identified by farmers fit broadly into five interconnected categories: finance, skills, lack of governmental support, competition and labour. When discussing possible solutions to overcome labour challenges, the majority of answers focused on targeting all of the above-mentioned challenges. By focusing on the systemic barriers to farming, it appears to be the assumption that a trickle-down process will ultimately lead to improved conditions for farm workers. Although the systemic barriers to farming indeed put pressure on labour, there are many other barriers and contradictions that suggest equitable farm labour may ultimately be a mythical achievement. However, by continuously returning to the naming the moment political analysis, inspired by Gramsci, the current conjuncture may be explored, allowing us to recognize the systemic roots of contradiction surrounding equitable

farm labour and allowing us to envision short term goals around which possible alliances may be formed.

In the extremely bleak and complex juncture between agriculture and labour, naming the moment is extremely useful as the process of naming the moment does not assume that immediate solutions are possible; but rather, that we must work within historical conditions toward short-term goals shaped by a longer-term vision. Chapters two and three, *Farming Challenges and Farm labour Options* and *The Farm Labour Debate*, present many of the constraints associated with including labour in an alternative and comprehensive food movement. This disregard for labour is perpetuated throughout the food system, including (and perhaps causing) a lack of societal awareness. Carolyn describes how this,

> I don't feel that labour comes up a lot with out consumers. Like. 'what are your labour practices?', I've never had a conversation like that. We've had lots of conversations about how we grow our food, what our organic practices are like, how we treat the land.

However, in the quest for a comprehensive food movement a conscious effort must be made not to blame consumers, while still recognizing the power they can yield. Although consumers may exert some form of control over their food sources, this is an extremely privileged option and pushing for consumer choice disregards the deep entrenchment of inequities within the food system. For example, societal views of what constitutes "good food" are greatly impacted by media and other outlets that control what information is made available. To recommend greater societal awareness also requires more conversations to be happening on farm labour in various domains.

The conversations pertaining to farm labour options that are occurring most prominently are focused on migrant workers and internships. The current conversations too often do not include sufficient structural analysis, nor do they address the unique challenges of farming. Therefore negative biases and stereotypes generalizing those labour options are touted. For example, there is currently a great deal of xenophobic and false discussion pertaining to the TFWP that encourages perceptions that migrant workers are taking jobs from Canadians[23]. Recent changes to the TFWP continue to undermine workers rights[24] and recently introduced Bill C-24 makes acquiring Canadian citizenship even more difficult[25]. Together this demonstrates a growing reliance on precarious workers, beyond the agricultural sector, where workers are blamed instead of the systems allowing for these inequitable program amendments.

Beyond the TFWP, the precariousness of internships has been gaining public attention. Earlier this year stories were run describing internships at prominent

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[23] For example, see: *RBC replaces Canadian staff with foreign workers,* found at: http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/rbc-replaces-canadian-staff-with-foreign-workers-1.1315008 on July 5, 2014

[24] For more information, see *Migrant workers prepare for more fees, shorter stays, no permanent status*, found at: http://www.migrantworkersalliance.org/migrant-workers-prepare-for-more-fees-shorter-stays-no-permanent-status/ from June 20, 2014 or *Government of Canada Overhauls Temporary Foreign Worker Program Ensuring Canadians are first in line for available jobs* found at: http://news.gc.ca/web/article-en.do?mthd=tp&crtr.page=1&nid=859859&crtr.tp1D=1 on July 5, 2014

[25] For more information, see *Bill C-24: The Stealing Citizenship Act* found at: http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/no-one-illegal/2014/07/bill-c-24-stealing-citizenship-act on June 5, 2014 or *Bill C-24: Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act* analysis by the Canadian Bar Association found at: http://www.cba.org/cba/submissions/pdf/14-22-eng.pdf on July 5, 2014

magazines, the Walrus and Toronto Life, being shut down[26]. With the Ontario Ministry of Labour investigating and enforcing or discouraging internships, a debate began regarding the fairness of internships. This debate was fairly limited to the media and business sectors and although internships may be generalized across the labour market, internships on farms were not commonly discussed during this particular debate in Ontario. However, in the spring of 2013, one year prior, a farm on Vancouver Island entered mediation with former interns and was required to compensate back wages (Mediation.com, 2013). There has been little information following this story, yet it sets a precedent for farmers relying on interns to be conscious of.

As these and similar stories lead the media and general public's interpretation of migrant and intern labour, the important role these labour forces play on farms generally does not get included in dialogue. Ontario and Canada are at a very insecure labour conjuncture. There is high unemployment, high levels of precarious employment and declining labour movements and union rates. Especially in farming this insecure labour conjuncture is particularly exaggerated as it combines with the many systemic barriers farmers face. The constraints and barriers of the current conjuncture require creative and inclusive efforts to explore a more just vision of farm labour. As labour and agriculture debates continue to occur, they must be challenged to provide a comprehensive analysis that continually names and evaluates the constraints and possibilities. Short-term goals must also be set with the hopes of challenging the dominant neoliberal policies that result in

[26] For example, see: *Unpaid Internships at Toronto Life, The Walrus shut down by Ontario* on July 5, 2014

precarious and vulnerable farming conditions. Alliances must be sought across sectors, such as the food, labour and even social and/or environmental sectors, and incremental goals, such as the inclusion of labour discussions in the food movement, must be put into effect.

Conclusions and Future Research

This exploratory study has conducted a preliminary examination of the broader challenges facing small- and medium-scale sustainable farms in Ontario and how this impacts decisions regarding farm labour. By including the voices of nine farmers, in addition to secondary research, this paper has attempted to contextualize farm labour challenges as identified by farmers within the current moment. While envisioning a food system that is just and equitable for both farmers and farm workers, there must be a comprehensive food ethic that is inclusive of all aspects of the current labour and agricultural moment.

It is counterproductive to believe by attacking specific farmers, or calling attention to specific cases of farm labour injustice a comprehensive food ethic will be achieved. It is imperative that the treatment of farm workers continues to be monitored by activists, academics, and government representatives. They must continue to call attention to super-exploitative working conditions; however, cross-sector alliances with farmers' and the food movement must address the structural factors leading to vulnerability for both farmers and farm workers. For example, those involved with the purchasing of food, such as consumers, markets, processors

and restaurants, must also include labour as a priority focus. Cross-sectorial alliances, notably in the US, have been successful[27] and by continuously calling to attention and recognizing the realties of farmers and farm workers these alliances will be more successful. The farmers in this study expressed they are too busy and fighting too many battles to front the farm labour debate. Nonetheless, there is great potential for alliances between farmers, the food movement and labour advocates, especially if the conditions that impact everyone are addressed.

Yet, in order to fully realize the current moment of labour and agriculture in Ontario, further research needs to be done. A more historical analysis is required to understand the current conjuncture of farm labour that must include, but not be limited to the issues of settler territory, urbanization, the North American Free Trade Agreement and it's impacts, flexibilization and just-in-time labour, and unions in Canada. In addition to a more historical analysis, a greater inclusion of current situations must also be considered. For example, the declining number of Canadian farmers, free trade agreements impacting the flow of labour and food, and efforts to further restrict farmers' autonomy, such as Bill C-18[28].

To suggest an ideal farm labour force that presents a goal to strive for, multiple perspectives, including voices of farm employees, must be recorded. Employee perspectives on their jobs would add immense value to the farm labour debate, yet in order for these voices to be included certain protections must first be

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[27] For information on a successful cross-sectoral alliance visit the Campaign for Fair Food organized by Coalition of Immokalee Workers at: http://ciw-online.org/ (last visited July 6, 2014)

[28] Bill C-18, the Agricultural Growth Act is an omnibus bill that restricts farmers autonomy, most notiably their ability to save seeds. For more information, see: http://www.nfu.ca/issue/stop-bill-c-18 (last visited July 6, 2014)

in place as workers often risk loosing their job when speaking to researchers and activists. Additionally, the continued inclusion of farmers' voices must expand beyond this exploratory research to increase numbers, locations, size and methods of farming. It must include older, and multiple-generation farmers' voices to provide insight in how farm labour has changed throughout the years. Expanding research on farm labour also requires a revision of interview questions. In a future study, inclusive of farmers' voices, questions could probe more details about the farm and farm finances, such as acreage, total income, understandings of the global food system and perspectives on the unionization of agricultural workers.

Finally, I hope to be a farmer. This research has created many questions for me around what type of labour I would have on my farm. As was made evident by a number of interviewees, there is a great challenge in practically being able to offer the type of employment believed to be equitable. This study has demonstrated that there are limited options for farmers who are vulnerable themselves. Even while remaining conscious of inequities and attempting to reduce them at the farm level, the current farm labour moment is such that farmers maintain minimal ability to influence farm labour options on a larger-scale. By challenging the dominant global food system, including multiple voices and continuously reflecting on the current moment to set achievable short-term goals, we may be able to move closer to realizing equitable farm labour. I hope to be part of those efforts.

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Appendix A- Farmer and Farm Summary

Farmer	Farm Name	Acres	Years operating	Number of workers including farmers for 2014	Current Primary labour force, in addition to own labour	Estimated labour % of total operating costs
Don	Little Donkey Farm	100; 10 in vegetable	~20	7-9 (including 3 part-time market cashiers)	Interns and a workers migrant worker	10%
Jim	Old Thyme Farm	50; 10 in vegetable	7	6	Interns and paid family members/co-farmers	35%
Jack	Tall Oaks		7	6-9	migrant workers	50%
Frieda and Glen	Three Sisters Farm	5 acres in production	9	4-6	Canadian workers	30%
Carolyn	Walnut Grove Farm	85; 10 in vegetables	6	5-8	Migrant workers and part-time Canadian workers	33%
Jay and Suzanne	Morning Glory	200; 5 in vegetables		4-5	Migrant workers	75%
Rachel	Sunshine Valley	5 in vegetable	6	5-6	Canadian workers	20-30%, including farmers 75%
Sam	Green Acres	50	18	7-12	Canadian workers	18% not including farmers
Gabriella	Windy Ridge		25	12	Canadian workers	30% with expected increase

Appendix B- preliminary interview questions

1. How did you become interested in farming and how long have you been farming?
2. What are your favorite parts of your job?
3. Why are you interested in sustainable agriculture and what does that look like on your farm?
4. What are some of the greatest challenges you have faced with regard to farming sustainably?
5. Do you now, or have you ever had worked off-farm while also farming?
6. Given the challenges specific to you and other small- and medium sustainable farmers, it is clear you need a dependable and dedicated workforce. In your view, what would an ideal labour force look like on your farm?
7. What suggestions do you have to making a more fair farming system that would allow for this ideal labour force?
8. What sorts of labour challenges have you faced?
9. What does your current labour force look like?
10. How have your labour requirements changed over the years? Can you describe the reality of experiences you have had with your labour force? Ie has your labour force changed over the years, what have been some positive or negative aspects.
11. What kind of a relationship do you typically develop with your workers?
12. How would you describe the conditions of working on your farm?
13. What percentage of overall operating costs go towards labour?
14. How do you feel about the way migrant agricultural workers are portrayed in the media?
15. Would you consider building alliances with labour and migrant worker justice organizations? How would you envision such an alliance?

Appendix C- final interview questions

1. How did you become interested in farming and how long have you been farming?
2. 1. How would you describe your farm? (ex. small-, medium- or large-scale; organic, agro-ecological, sustainable etc; family, or any other descriptors)
3. What are your favorite parts of your job?
4. Why are you interested in sustainable agriculture and what does that look like on your farm?
5. What are some of the greatest challenges you have faced with regard to farming sustainably?
6. What are some of the biggest changes or larger forces that have occurred in agriculture in the last century affecting Ontario farmers?
7. What are some of the labour challenges you have faced?
8. What does your current labour force look like?
9. How have your labour requirements changed over the years? Can you describe the reality of experiences you have had with your labour force? Ie has your labour force changed over the years, what have been some positive or negative aspects.
10. How would you describe the advantages/disadvantages of each of the following labour forces: family, interns, Canadian employees, migrant workers (coming under SAWP or the TFWP/LSPP).
11. How would you describe the conditions of working on your farm?
12. What percentage of overall operating costs go towards labour?
13. In your view, what would an ideal labour force look like on your farm?
14. What suggestions do you have to making a more fair farming system that would allow for this ideal labour force?
15. Have you ever worked off-farm to support your business?
16. How do you feel about the way migrant agricultural workers are portrayed in the media?
17. There has been talk recently in the media and labour movement of migrant workers who have been sent home for complaining of unjust conditions, paying taxes/EI/pensions they cannot receive, being denied medical access etc. What are your thoughts on these instances? How would you feel about certain program changes that may address such experiences?
18. Do you see a role for yourself or your farm supporting the labour movement in creating more just conditions for farmworkers?
    A) If not, what could be done to making this more appealing to you?
    B) If yes, what might this look like?