

Role of Jamaican Migrant Farm Workers in the Ontario Agri-food Industry

by

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Abstract

This research explores the pivotal role of Jamaican migrant farm workers within Ontario's agri-food industry, contextualized within the framework of the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) established in 1966. Highlighting the historical evolution of the program and its impact on the agricultural labour landscape, the study investigates how processes such as digitization, consolidation, and financialization influence labour practices and the experiences of these workers. Through a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and interviews, the study reveals the complexities of labour relationships shaped by racial capitalism, illustrating how systemic inequalities persist within the industry. The findings illuminate the critical challenges faced by Jamaican migrant workers, including exploitation and marginalization, against the backdrop of changing agricultural dynamics. This research not only contributes to a deeper understanding of the socio-economic factors affecting migrant workers but also emphasizes the need for equitable policies that address historical injustices and promote better working conditions within the agri-food sector.

Foreword

Combined with the engagement of MES components, such as the Plan of Study and Research Proposal, my Major Research Paper plays a vital role in fulfilling the requirements of my MES degree by contributing to knowledge specific to my area of concentration. My Major Research Paper has enhanced understanding in three key areas: 1. Sustainable land use, agriculture, and food; 2. Food system policy; and 3. Equity and inclusion of diverse cultures and communities in food system planning.

Focusing on the role of Jamaican migrant farm workers in Ontario's agri-food industry, my research specifically examines worker experience in the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) —a current crucial part of the Canadian food system. It reveals critical themes within food system processes, including social justice, labour rights, capitalism and inadequate policy-making relevant to my learning objectives. By highlighting the socio-economic factors that affect migrant workers, this research deepens the understanding of the intersection between environmental issues and social equity. This study not only enriches the academic discourse surrounding ecological and economic sustainment of food systems but also underscores the importance of integrating diverse cultural perspectives into planning processes.

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Terms and Definitions

1. Racial Capitalism: An analytical framework that explores the interconnections between race and capitalist exploitation in economic contexts (Robinson, 1983).
2. Financialization: The increasing influence of financial stakeholders in agriculture, such as banks, monetary firms and other businesses with capital interest (Sommerville & Magnan, 2015; Fernando, 2021).
3. Consolidation: The increasing concentration of farmland and other agricultural resources in fewer hands (Magnan et. al, 2022).
4. Digitization: The increasing use of digital technologies in agriculture, such as yield monitors and maps, global positioning systems (GPS), sensors, and robotics (Rotz et al., 2019).
5. Food System: The interconnected network involving all activities related to the production, processing, distribution, and consumption of food (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2025).

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Background and Context

The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) was instituted in 1966 by the Canadian government as a component of the broader Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) program to address labour shortages in Canada's primary agricultural sector (Government of Canada, 2025a). It was established through bilateral agreements between the federal government of Canada and various governments of Global South farming communities and is enforced through the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and the Immigration and Refugee Protection. Initially, the program commenced with the inclusion of 264 Jamaican citizens to harvest tobacco in Ontario (Perry, 2012). Over the years, it has undergone several expansions, extending opportunities to citizens from Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, as well as Mexico (Weiler et al., 2017; Binford, 2019). Approximately 40,000 farmworkers from the Caribbean and Mexico migrate to Canada annually (Binford, 2019), with more than half based in Ontario.

Jamaican migrant farm workers play a critical role in the Canadian agri-food system. They participate in the intricate food supply chain that connects production with consumption, involving various stakeholders such as farmers, manufacturers, distributors, and retailers (Carbone, 2017). Jamaican farm workers migrate to Canada during the bustling growing season to cultivate farmlands, harvest food crops and return to Jamaica before December 15 (Government of Canada, 2025a). They work for fruit and vegetable farmers in greenhouses and

farms producing various crop commodities like apples, strawberries, tomatoes, cabbage, bell peppers, among other crops.

The evolution of the SAWP reflects not only Ontario's labour market dynamics but also broader trends in how the agricultural landscape is changing in Canada. For instance, processes like digitization, consolidation and financialization have become common practice within the agri-food industry (Rotz, 2019; Magnan et al, 2022). I explore how these processes impact labour practices and heightened corporate influence within the food sector to reveal underlying structures of racial capitalism, where the exploitation and marginalization of racial workers, including migrant farm workers, persist. Issues such as land appropriation and colonial legacies of agrarian reform illustrate how historical and systemic inequalities shape the experiences within industries, including agricultural production (Robinson, 2020). My research aims to critically examine how these transformative processes impact labour dynamics among Jamaican migrant farm workers, thereby illuminating the multifaceted opportunities and challenges they experience within Ontario's agri-food industry.

One of the arguments from workers and activists is the pivotal role that farm workers play in food production and household food security, yet little is done by governing bodies to uphold workers' rights and dignity (Allahdua & Dunsworth, 2023). Jamaican migrant farm workers and other farm workers alike have no voice in their employment rights and freedom, and this has led to migrant workers' needs being critically overlooked, leaving room for mistreatment by employers and manipulation of agreements to benefit parties that profit most. Workers have for a long time experienced harsh working conditions in Canada through subjection to strenuous jobs, low wages, long hours and inhumane living conditions, all while being tied to one employer

who often forces performance and compliance with the threat of being deported (Binford, 2019; Thomas, 2016).

The SAWP holds contracts exclusively with Global South countries like Jamaica, which are often racialized communities that were once colonized. The purpose of this targeted outsourcing strategy is to support Canada's food market, which heavily relies on the global competitiveness of its agricultural industry, by exporting low-wage labour from countries with economic needs (Weiler et al., 2017). This places Canadian farmers at the forefront of driving agricultural production while having marginalized communities at their mercy. Without limitations of capitalist motives in driving wealth accumulation through land and labour force production, labour practices can mimic structures of racial capitalism. Thus, temporary labour arrangements, such as those facilitated by the SAWP, although frequently advocated as a strategy to safeguard global food security (Weiler et al., 2017), provoke inquiry on injustices within Ontario's agri-food industry's labour market. Should the workforce at the base of the food supply chain be given such a major role in safeguarding the food security of the Global North, is the fitting reward recognition or exploitation?

Change within this sector requires critical knowledge of the community's needs while rejecting the "one size fits all" approach, incentivized by capitalist economies, which can lead to cultural exclusion and ignorance. The current food system approach raises important livelihood questions regarding how much bilateral government agreements prioritize migrant worker needs in the host country and the home country. Although these agreements aim to create a balance between labour shortages and income security, it favours the employers' needs and rights, and is underpinned by dynamics of injustice, including racism, discrimination, and exploitation in the

program (e.g., long hours, low wages and unsafe working and living conditions) from the lack of equitable protective measures.

1.2. Statement of Research Topic

Jamaica represents the longest-standing participant in the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) and serves as the primary case study within the framework of my research. My study examines the role of Jamaican migrant farm workers in the Ontario agri-food industry within the framework of racial capitalism. Despite Jamaica and Canada being situated in different hemispheres, their interconnectedness is evident through commonalities in their respective food system players and intergovernmental affairs.

The Ontario agricultural sector currently grapples with significant labour supply challenges, primarily characterized by difficulties in recruitment and retention (Government of Canada, 2024). Numerous factors contribute to these challenges, including arduous working conditions, seasonal employment fluctuations, rural job locations, and competition from other sectors offering better wages (Government of Canada, 2024). Consequently, there is a declining willingness among Canadian workers to pursue employment in the agricultural sector.

Compounding these issues is the aging demographic of farmers, which threatens to decrease the operational number of farms upon their retirement, unless there is an influx of new entrants to the industry. The strenuous demands of agricultural work, coupled with relatively low wages, have led to a trend of younger generations moving away from agricultural careers. According to projections by the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC), labour shortages are anticipated to surpass 100,000 vacancies by 2030, with 40% of Ontario farmers expected to retire by 2033 (Government of Canada, 2024). These demographic trends portend significant

implications for the Canadian food system, resulting in an ongoing reliance on temporary foreign workers. Furthermore, without proper protection of workers in place while meeting Canadian agri-food needs, the reliance on migrant farm workers can manifest into exploitation. Jamaican migrant farm workers on the SAWP exemplify this dynamic, as they often face precarious working conditions and limited rights, encountering barriers such as insufficient wages, inadequate housing, and a lack of access to legal protections. Racial capitalism highlights the economic disparities and social injustices that arise from relations with the SAWP, as the financial gains generated by the agricultural sector often do not translate into improved livelihoods for migrant workers, reinforcing cycles of poverty and dependency. Moreover, as racialized individuals, Jamaican migrant farm workers are subjected to additional layers of vulnerability related to their immigration status and perceived social worth. That is, factors such as race and immigration status (i.e., closed work permits) compound their struggles and make their situation more precarious (Allahdua & Dunsworth, 2023). My research analyzed how financialization, digitization, and consolidation in Canadian agriculture affect Jamaican migrant worker experiences and living conditions, focusing on how these dynamics are structured by racialization and immigration. In turn, the project revealed larger patterns of exploitation inherent in racial capitalism.

1.3. Research Objectives and Questions

This research explores how the livelihoods of Jamaican migrant farm workers are impacted by the structures and incentives of the Canadian food system, particularly through the lens of racial capitalism. It examines how processes of **financialization, consolidation, and digitization** influence labour relations, often exacerbating inequalities rooted in racial and economic systems. Furthermore, it considers how the bilateral relationship between Jamaica and

Canada shapes their respective agri-food systems within the context of racialized labour markets. Finally, my research investigates how economic, political, and social factors, underpinned by dynamics of racial capitalism, have driven Jamaicans to become temporary foreign workers in Ontario.

The examination of digitalization explores the increasing significance of digital technologies, such as satellite and drone imaging, GPS-guided machinery, robotics, and Big Data in agriculture. In 2020, over 50% of Ontario farms utilized technology such as robotic milking, automated guidance steering systems, and geographic information system mapping, ranking the province fourth in Canada (Rotz et al., 2019; Statistics Canada, 2022). Additionally, soil sample testing and geographic information system mapping were widely used to improve farming efficiency and environmental protection (Statistics Canada, 2022). One area of inquiry in this process concerns the ways in which farmers manage manual labour in comparison to machine labour in order to enhance farm performance and efficiency, particularly in the context of racialized labour forces. Also significant are the types of technologies implemented on farms for migrant farm workers and whether digitalization helps to make their jobs on Ontario farms perpetuate systems of discipline and surveillance, reflective of broader structures of racial capitalism.

Secondly, my research investigates the increasing concentration of farmland and other agricultural resources in fewer hands through consolidation, particularly exploring how racial capitalism is involved in this process. Between 1941 and 1966, the period during which the SAWP was initiated, Canada saw a 41 percent decline in the number of farms, dropping from 733,000 to 431,000 (Falconer, 2020). At the same time, the average size of these farms grew from 237 acres to 404 acres, marking an increase of 70 percent (Falconer, 2020). Moreover,

Statistics from the 2021 Census revealed that there were 48,346 farms in Ontario, compared to 49,600 farms in 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2022). The reduction in farms can signify the acquisition of farmland by large farmers, farm corporations or land investors, often driven by economic disparities that disproportionately affect marginalized, including racialized communities. Consolidation not only highlights the inequities faced by smallholders but also reveal how longstanding dynamics of racial capitalism can influence access to resources and land ownership. While farm ownership is more common among smaller farms—where increasing rental tenure correlates with larger farm sizes (Rotz et al., 2019)—larger farms are more likely to hire migrant farm workers than smaller farms under 70 acres (National Farmers Union, 2021). The consolidation of farmland often exacerbates existing inequalities related to race and class, affecting the conditions under which migrant farm workers labour. How does the consolidation of farmland impact migrant farm worker conditions, particularly for those from racialized backgrounds? Additionally, how does the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) impact land ownership in the home countries of migrant farm workers, often entrenching patterns of racial and economic inequality?

Finally, this research will examine financialization through the growing influence of financial actors and principles in the agricultural sector, which is moving farming from a livelihood practice to a profit and investment-oriented activity. Financial actors are having a growing influence on land investment, farm corporatization, equipment and crop input dependence, and crop insurance and derivatives (crop futures markets). For instance, land acquisition is interconnected with capital capacity, and increasingly, land is treated as a financial asset. As farm size increases, expenses increase, while smaller farms tend to experience more financial pressures (Rotz et al., 2019). These trends place higher-income farmers and

corporations in line to acquire land, impacting land pricing and ownership models. Although financialization has only in recent years captured the attention of researchers, it has been in practice for decades. An earlier example, a few years before the SAWP launch, was when the Agricultural Rehabilitation and Development Act (ARDA) was passed in 1961 by the Federal and Provincial parliaments of Canada to address low-income farmers in rural areas of Canada (Bunce, 1973). ARDA facilitated the consolidation and enlargement of farmlands. The Farm Consolidation and Enlargement programme operated through acquiring land from low-income farms and leasing it to lower-middle-income farmers able to afford a farm size increase for a 5-year renewable agreement. This scheme favoured higher-income farmers in the redistribution of land. When higher-income farmers and corporations acquire land, it can lead to the concentration of land ownership in the hands of fewer entities. The exclusion of low-income farmers can lead to corporate control over agricultural resources and increase their market power. The growing practice has led to corporatization in agriculture, where businesses and corporations begin to dominate the sector. Sommerville & Magnan (2015) highlight a significant connection in this transition occurring within the agrifood sector, wherein businesses and corporations, in response to rising food price inflation, have increasingly sought to capitalize on market opportunities. This has led to strategic investments in resources such as farmlands, which provide a stable mechanism for wealth preservation (Sommerville & Magnan, 2015). The accumulation of land ownership can lead to the oppression of small-scale farmers, less competition in the farming industry, and greater dominance of food production and distribution by larger agri-businesses.

Research Questions:

In this research, I make the following inquiry:

1. What are the existing labour relationships within the Ontario agri-food sector, and how do they affect the conditions and experiences of Jamaican migrant farm workers?

1a. What are the specific impacts of financialization, digitization, and consolidation on the livelihoods of Jamaican migrant farm workers in the Ontario agri-food industry?

2. What has driven Jamaican migrant farmworkers to participate in the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program?

In addressing my research questions, I begin by examining the existing labour relationships within Ontario's agrifood industry, and then I focus specifically on the dynamics of the SAWP. Next, I assess how existing labour relationships influence working conditions, living conditions, and wages perpetuates exploitation or benefits Jamaican migrant farm workers. Specific impacts of broader economic trends such as financialization, digitization, and consolidation are then examined, focusing on how these factors affect livelihoods through changes in employment rates and labour performance. I then discuss the implications of said processes and relationships.

1.4. Significance of the Study

My research examines the experiences of Jamaican migrant farm workers in Ontario, particularly within the framework of the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP). This study aims to shed light on the nuanced impacts of the SAWP on the workers through agreements, relationships and labour practices and processes that shape their experience.

Additionally, the relevance of this research to capitalist systems cannot be overlooked. Jamaican migrant farm workers often navigate a labour market that exploits their vulnerabilities while simultaneously devaluing their contributions. The SAWP exemplifies how economic systems benefit from the labour of marginalized groups, neglecting their rights and well-being. In the context of financialization, digitization, and consolidation in agriculture, these dynamics become even more complex. Understanding these interconnected dynamics of financialization, digitization, and consolidation within the agricultural landscape and labour practices is essential for addressing inequalities within the agricultural sector. In examining the experiences of Jamaican migrant farm workers through racial capitalism, this examination creates more awareness, which can inform equitable policies and practices that support both the workers and the agri-food industry.

My research can benefit Jamaican farm workers in several ways. By examining the relationship between the Canadian food system and food systems in a Global South country like Jamaica, this study aims to shed light on the challenges that the Canadian system presents for Jamaican migrant farm worker livelihoods. The research also informs agri-food industry stakeholders on the impact of digitalization, consolidation, and financialization on the food system within the context of the agri-food labour market. By highlighting the systemic challenges that affect migrant farm workers, my research seeks to bring attention to issues such as racism, discrimination, exploitation, and injustice within the agricultural industry. Understanding and addressing these issues could lead to awareness in the working conditions, representation, and rights of Jamaican migrant farm workers in Canada. Furthermore, by advocating for a food system that is inclusive of the migrant worker community and rejecting a "one size fits all" approach driven by capitalist, export-oriented economies, this research aims to

provoke further inquiry on an equitable and just food system that takes into account the needs and experiences of migrant workers in Canada and Jamaica. Ultimately, the findings from this research could help to inform policy changes and initiatives aimed at better protecting the rights and improving the conditions of Jamaican farm workers in Canada. It is also an advantage that the research is being done by a member of the Jamaican community, allowing for representation in the field, considering cultural sensitivity and understanding.

Furthermore, by examining the impact of the Canadian food system on Jamaican migrant workers and the implications for both Canadian and Jamaican populations, this research contributes valuable insights to the scientific and scholarly community. The study sheds light on the complex interplay between agricultural system players in developed and developing countries, shedding light on the challenges, opportunities, and power dynamics involved. In connecting the effects of digitalization, consolidation, and financialization on the social structures within the food system, I offer a multi-dimensional analysis of how labour conditions intersect with broader economic and social processes. This nuanced approach can provide scholarly communities with a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in contemporary agricultural systems and labour dynamics. Moreover, the examination of the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) and its historical context provides a comprehensive perspective on the evolution of labour migration policies and their impacts. Such insights can inform discussions and debates regarding international labour mobility, human rights, and social justice within the context of global food systems. In summary, this research presents a holistic and critical analysis of the interactions between Canadian and Jamaican food systems, contributing significantly to scholarly discussions on migration, labour rights, food security, and

social justice. The findings have the potential to promote greater awareness and understanding within the public, farming, and scholarly communities.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1. Racial Capitalism

In this section, I introduce the key theoretical framework of racial capitalism, examining the interplay between racism and capitalism. The application of this framework is taken from Robinson's (1983) influential work, *Black Marxism*, highlighting how feudal structures influenced the rise of capitalist systems. The theoretical framework is then reviewed through critiques that articulate the agrarian question, focusing on the concepts of accumulation and production within agricultural contexts, making significant points on labour commodification during colonial periods and its evolution into contemporary temporary migrant labour systems, underscoring the systemic exploitation of racialized communities. Furthermore, this section outlines the historical foundations and complexities of racial capitalism, asserting the necessity for markets to operate within a framework of democratic accountability. It establishes how concepts of racial superiority emerged in feudal Europe, intertwining with class struggles that fueled wealth accumulation. Additionally, this section explores the systemic exclusion of workers from production and its implications for power dynamics, with capitalists prioritizing profit over worker welfare, as noted by Albritton (2009). I then highlight Sharpe's (2016) concept of "The Wake," illustrating the ongoing socio-economic oppressions faced by Black communities due to the historical impacts of slavery. Next, I shift my review to the agri-food industry's role in perpetuating poverty among workers while enriching a small demographic of landowners, drawing on Akram-Lodhi's (2021) analysis of colonial land dispossession and the

commodification of resources. Albritton emphasizes the historical context of enclosure and property rights transformation, revealing the roots of racial capitalism and ongoing marginalization. The section concludes by underscoring the intertwined struggles of race and class, pointing to the need for further research into these dynamics and their contemporary implications.

The concept of racial capitalism emerged prominently in the 1970s amidst the struggle against apartheid in South Africa (Kelley, 2023; Goldstein, 2022). Its recognition expanded significantly due to Cedric Robinson's influential work, particularly in his 1983 publication, *Black Marxism*. Racial capitalism examines how race and exploitation are interconnected within capitalist systems, highlighting that capitalism relies on racial differences to produce and accumulate capital. Recent advancements in Black Studies have reignited scholarly interest in Robinson's conceptual framework (Kelley, 2023). Although Robinson's primary focus was not on racial capitalism per se, he introduced the term to elucidate the intricate connections between racialized exploitation and capital accumulation, setting the groundwork for further scholarly exploration, including its application and analytical implications (Kelley, 2023).

Cedric Robinson's examination of capitalism emphasizes that it is significantly influenced by racism and nationalism, proposing that the rise of capitalism was facilitated by the structures of feudal society. Robinson (2020, p. 89) remarks in *Black Marxism* that the feudal state was characterized by a complex interplay of “social, cultural, political, and ideological” elements, which played a crucial role in shaping the economic landscape of European feudalism. Furthermore, the integration of feudal and capitalist practices fostered a competitive economic environment that impacted production and exchange processes. Robinson emphasizes that the feudal state, pivotal for the “bourgeoisie,” inherently opposed the notion of global trade

integration (Robinson, 2020). This opposition, Robinson argues, was motivated by a self-serving quest for wealth accumulation. He contrasts this with the “rationalistic thrusts of an economistic worldview” and the “political momenta of collectivist logic,” suggesting a complex interaction between differing economic ideologies (Robinson, 2020, p. 89).

In a capitalist framework, profit maximization emerges as the principal aim across industries and business models, with agriculture being no exception. As Robinson's critiques of capitalism aim to broaden the original Marxist perspectives, further contextual relevance arises from examining the agrarian question, which seeks to articulate the intersection of capitalism and agriculture. Henry Bernstein's deconstruction of the agrarian question identifies three fundamental elements (Akram-Lodhi, 2010). The first element, “accumulation,” posits that agriculture can generate excess food and non-food products beyond its reproductive necessities, reinforcing the need for agricultural surplus to support resource costs and catalyze capital development across agriculture and associated sectors (Akram-Lodhi, 2010).

The second element, “production,” centers on the evolution of capitalism in rural locales, stressing the transformation of the peasantry and the commodification of labour. The commodification of labour was especially pronounced during the colonial era when colonialists relied on cheap, productive labour, often sourced from enslaved individuals living at subsistence levels (Akram-Lodhi, 2021). Literature has shown that a history of exploitative labour practices is associated with migratory patterns. Choudry et al. (2009), referencing Hayter (2000), delineate four significant migration periods: the transatlantic slave trade, indentured labour migration, northern emigration from Europe to the Global South, and the post-World War II migration from the Global South to the Global North. The SAWP aligns with the fourth period, as Canada began importing workers from Caribbean countries and Mexico to mitigate labour shortages following

World War II (Binford, 2019). This evolution of exploitable and unfree labour practices reflects a transition from absolute slavery to contracted indentured servitude and, ultimately, to the contemporary temporary migrant labour system, systematically targeting and exploiting racialized communities.

Furthermore, this commodification extends to rural economies, wherein peasants find themselves estranged from the land they traditionally cultivated. This is particularly evident in the conversion of peasants into proletarians, driven by separation from land and the urgency to fulfill family needs that were traditionally self-sustained (Akram-Lodhi, 2010). Workers increasingly find themselves selling their labour to diverse employers, including urban entities, rural capitalist farmers, non-farm enterprises, and small producers transitioning to agrarian capitalist roles (Akram-Lodhi, 2010). This transition has historically forced peasants to sell their labour power to capitalists, underscoring the link between the commodification of land and labour (Albritton, 2009). Akram-Lodhi (2010) posits that when individuals can no longer fulfill their basic needs independently, they are invariably compelled to sell their labour for survival.

This transformation shifts the purpose of agricultural production from subsistence to commercial exchange, underscoring the broader implications of commodification on livelihood and societal structures (Akram-Lodhi, 2010). The literature demonstrates that the legacies of colonialism, intertwined with the evolution of capitalism, continue to shape socio-economic relationships and power dynamics today. The extraction and commodification processes established in colonial times have laid the groundwork for contemporary inequalities and economic practices that warrant ongoing examination.

The third element addresses “politics,” interrogating the influence of rural agriculture on political dynamics. This facet examines how the balance of power among various social classes shapes political processes and how these processes, in turn, affect agricultural development and broader societal transformations (Akram-Lodhi, 2010). Collectively, these perspectives provide a comprehensive overview of the intricate relationships among capitalism, agriculture, and labour systems, underlining the necessity for an integrated approach to addressing the social and environmental challenges of contemporary agricultural practices

The influence of capital on agriculture significantly shapes trade agreements globally. Akram-Lodhi (2021) argues that when analyzed through a capitalist framework, the roots of global trade can be traced back to colonial practices. Colonial powers advocated for free trade; however, they sought competitive advantages that prioritized profit extraction from colonized regions. This was often facilitated by erecting market barriers that hindered imports from colonies, resulting in manufacturers in colonial powers reaping profits while avoiding competition (Akram-Lodhi, 2021). The outcome of these practices was a substantial disparity in capital accumulation between the colonialists and the colonies.

Contrastingly, some economists believe that challenges within food supply chains arise primarily when free markets are hindered by interference (Albritton, 2009). They argue that allowing free markets to operate with minimal regulation is the solution to various issues related to food provision. However, this perspective neglects the inherent profit orientation of capital, which often leads to a prioritization of producing high-profit goods at the expense of ethical considerations, such as low wages for migrant workers (Albritton, 2009; Rawal, 2014). Albritton (2009) asserts the necessity for markets and corporations to operate within a framework that fosters democratic accountability beyond capitalism itself.

These dynamics set the stage for the historical foundations of racism within the context of European class structures. Cedric Robinson argues that concepts of racial superiority and inferiority became entrenched in much of feudal Europe, leading to class struggles that allowed racism to drive wealth accumulation (Kelley, 2023). Racialists sought to assert dominance of whites over people of colour and establish a hierarchy among whites by promoting the belief in Aryan or Nordic superiority (Robinson, 2020). The rise of capitalism involved diverse ethnic and cultural groups. The affluent class emerged from specific backgrounds, while the working class, farmers, and enslaved individuals came from different cultures. Instead of promoting uniformity, European capitalism emphasized and amplified regional and cultural differences, presenting them as if they were "racial" distinctions (Robinson, 2020). That is, regional and cultural differences, through European civilization, evolved as human features used to categorize human value, therefore reframing the term "racial" within the concept of racial capitalism to involve cultural distinctions, moving beyond a simplistic binary distinction of racism encapsulating the racialization of coloured minorities. Instead, it encompasses a broader analysis that considers the nuances among all races, cultures, and social classes. By doing so, it underscores how these distinctions contribute to the construction of socio-economic hierarchies that reinforce systemic inequalities and power dynamics. This understanding illuminates the complex interplay between race and capitalism, highlighting the ways in which various social groups are positioned within these hierarchies.

The role of the state in defining and reproducing class distinctions is crucial, as it determines individuals' "value, occupation, and citizenship status" (Kelley, 2023). Those profiled as lower classes were often relegated to specific jobs, such as mercenaries, domestic workers, and agricultural labourers (Kelley, 2023). However, even as changes are made within proletarian

realities, such as increased wages, marginalization remains, as the mere impact of these changes challenges capitalists to produce more to offset costs, as seen in how wages compete with inflation. This marginalization suggests that struggles from the lower classes do not inherently lead to the eradication of racism, even when they challenge capitalist profits (Kelley, 2023). Thus, the concept of racial capitalism emerges through these historical struggles, intertwining race with economic dynamics (Kelley, 2023). The intertwining of race and class reveals that the emergence of the middle class did not occur in isolation with capitalism; rather, class struggle has been present throughout history, as various middle classes and bourgeois factions competed for influence, resources, and access to commerce (Kelley, 2023). My interpretation from the literature is that disparities in wealth among individuals have historically existed, and while racial distinctions have always been present, capitalism has provided a rationale for exploiting racial differences as a means to unethically ascend the economic hierarchy.

Colonialism has undoubtedly influenced the shaping of the agricultural labour system through capital, extractive resource practices, property, global trade, labour and the prioritization of merchant interests. The interconnectedness of these elements during the colonial era has led to lasting impacts of colonialism, which are showcased in today's global affairs. Furthermore, settler colonialism laid the groundwork for racial capitalism by systematically displacing Indigenous peoples to acquire land and resources for global capitalist expansion while exploiting Black people through the transatlantic slave trade and the system of slavery (Ralph & Singhal, 2019; Carretta, 2015). Akram-Lodhi (2021) argues that the extraction of natural resources from colonized lands was not solely an economic endeavour but also served as a mechanism for establishing monopolistic practices that perpetuated discrimination, social hierarchies, and violence. This framework elucidates how colonial powers utilized trade as a facade to impose

their dominance, thereby crafting a legacy that continues to inform economic practices in contemporary society. Economic activities such as production, trade, and investment became the foundation of the global economy and the international division of labour (Akram-Lodhi, 2021). The extracted funds from the colonized countries provided resources for the Industrial Revolution while depriving the world of equality (Akram-Lodhi, 2021). Although precisely quantifying the value extracted from colonized territories is challenging, it is evident that a significant portion of the wealth generated from colonies was retained within the colonizing nations. For instance, in the United States, the output of enslaved labour is roughly estimated to have generated around 97 trillion dollars (Akram-Lodhi, 2021). In many formerly colonized countries, the opposite is evident. These nations have become impoverished, stripped of their resources, struggle to rebuild their infrastructure, and are often classified as part of the Third World.

Racial capitalism's tie to slavery acknowledges the historical and ongoing exploitation of racialized populations as a fundamental element of capitalist accumulation and the expansion of transnational economic systems (Issar, 2021). Sharpe (2016) references Youngquist (2011) to highlight the catastrophic impact of the transatlantic slave trade, which systematically subjected Black people to orchestrated terror. Capitalists benefit from commodities as they carve out their positions in the global exchange market, ultimately maximizing profits at the expense of human lives and dignity (Sharpe, 2016; Robinson, 2020). Commodity trade highlights how the production and exchange of goods derived from the exploitation of racially marginalized labour have been fundamental to capital accumulation within capitalist economies (Ralph & Singhal, 2019). Historically, commodities like sugar, cotton, and tobacco, produced by enslaved populations, were vital to the growth of global capitalism, with forced labour being a core

element of production during the transatlantic slave trade. Scholars such as Albritton (2009) have argued that the commodification of agricultural products often obscures the labour conditions under which they are produced, particularly for racialized groups. Marx's theory of the commodity emphasizes that, in a pure capitalist framework, ownership translates to absolute control over the means of production, effectively marginalizing workers (Albritton, 2009). The systemic exclusion of workers from the means of production establishes a power dynamic in which capitalists dictate working conditions and wages, often prioritizing profit over employee welfare unless necessitated by government intervention (Albritton, 2009).

In a complementary perspective, Sharpe (2016) examines the lasting effects of slavery on Black communities, coining the term "The Wake" to describe the persistent socio-economic oppressions faced by Black individuals long after emancipation (Sharpe, 2016). She underscores that the ramifications of slavery extend beyond mere historical remnants, manifesting in ongoing economic hardship, racial bias, and social exclusion (Sharpe, 2016). This highlights that the quest for genuine freedom and justice remains a pressing issue, as historical trauma continues to shape the lives of Black people today (Sharpe, 2016).

Furthermore, the profits generated by the agri-food industry frequently benefit a limited demographic of landowners and corporations while perpetuating cycles of poverty for individual workers. This perspective emphasizes how the exploitation of lands and labour has been crucial to the accumulation of wealth and perpetuation of racial hierarchies (Issar, 2021). It recognizes the lasting impact of dispossession, exploitation, and labour extraction on communities. The concept of property, within the context of capitalism and colonialism, is closely tied to the ownership of land. Albritton (2009) aligns with Marx's interpretation of "land" as a natural resource capable of being transformed into private property, which highlights how ownership is

foundational to capitalist structures. Scholars such as Akram-Lodhi note that colonialists acquired exclusive possession of land through “violent extirpation and forced dispossession,” enabling them to commodify land extensively (Akram-Lodhi, 202, p. 5). This commodification extended beyond mere territory and included the exploitation of enslaved individuals, particularly in the context of Britain's involvement in the “triangular trade” between West Africa and Britain (Akram-Lodhi, 2021).

As capitalism expanded, the process of commodifying the commons in Britain facilitated the transition from shared land to exclusive ownership by feudal landlords (Albritton, 2009). In discussing the commodification process, Albritton (2009) highlights that Marx does not presuppose the complete commodification of resources as an established norm. This shift resulted in the enclosure of lands and the appropriation of common resources for private gain. Marx emphasizes the gradual commodification of land, particularly how land once held in common is appropriated by a powerful landlord class, often through the violent expulsion of commoners. Landlords subsequently charged rent and engaged in practices that fortified their political power, such as authoritarian settlement (Albritton, 2009). This historical context illustrates how the transformation of property rights significantly influenced societal structures and economic relations. This historical context is critical to understanding the current dynamics of racial capitalism, where similar exploitative practices persist, revealing the ongoing struggles faced by marginalized communities within global economic systems.

2.1.1. Research Application of Racial Capitalism

Racial capitalism is used in this research to explore key issues within the food system. Specifically, I use the concept to explore the symbiotic relationship between the exploitation of

the Jamaican migrant farm worker community and the systemic accumulation of capital between institutions and agribusinesses through processes of digitization, consolidation and financialization. As an analytical framework, racial capitalism considers how the labour of migrant farm workers supports the production of agricultural goods within a racialized economic system, emphasizing how their marginalized status contributes to capital accumulation within the agricultural sector (Issar, 2021). Racial capitalism is closely associated with the exploitation of migrant farm labour within the agricultural sector (NicGhabhann, 2018). Racialized migrant farm workers have historically endured issues such as difficult working conditions, low wages, and limited labour rights, illustrating the systematic exploitation present in the capitalist agricultural system (Weiler et al., 2017). Many scholars believe that capitalism is inextricably racist. The concept posits that capitalism fundamentally relies on the exploitation of racialized groups, intertwining economic systems with social hierarchies. Therefore, when we consider capitalism, we must acknowledge its racial dimensions that contribute to inequalities among groups for the sake of self-gain. Historically, this perspective reveals how capitalist structures have perpetuated racial inequalities, particularly in labour markets. This framework provides a critical lens through which to examine the experiences of migrant farm workers in Canada, especially those participating in the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP), who often navigate precarious labour conditions within the agricultural sector. Racial capitalism as a framework allows for an analysis of how commodity trade has been intertwined with racialized labour and exploitation, shaping wealth accumulation and economic development within global capitalist systems, facilitating the integration of capitalism with emerging agri-food processes.

2.2. Preliminary Analysis of Relationship Structures within the SAWP

The relational structures of the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) are essential in understanding the experience of Jamaican migrant farm workers through the racial capitalism lens. I focus on the relationships of the three key players involved in the bilateral agreements: the involved government bodies (i.e., the Canadian and Jamaican governments), employers (i.e., farmers) and employees (i.e., Jamaican migrant farm workers). The varying roles of major stakeholders and regulatory laws are critical to the success of the SAWP in year-over-year capital accumulation in Ontario's agri-food industry. Thus, the regulatory framework and functions of these relationships are critical in how racial capitalism is practiced in the SAWP worker-employer labour relations.

2.2.1. Government of Canada

Numerous government agencies oversee and regulate the operations of the program, with the aim of ensuring that it adheres to established guidelines and maintains compliance from both workers and employers. The SAWP is administered in partnership with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) (Government of Canada, 2025a). While the IRCC assesses work permits allowing Jamaican migrants to work legally in Canada, the CBSA issues the work permits at Ports of Entry and ensures immigration compliance when migrant workers arrive in Canada. At the border, Jamaican workers are issued a specific type of permit known as a closed work permit, which restricts workers to one employer. Closed work permits can provide a structured employment arrangement for Jamaican migrant farm workers in securing a designated employer. However, they have potential vulnerabilities associated with workers being tied to one employer. The restriction to a single

employer creates a precarious situation, particularly when working conditions become adverse, including the presence of unsafe environments or inadequate wages (Binford, 2019; Thomas, 2016). Under such circumstances, migrant workers may encounter significant challenges in seeking alternative employment without jeopardizing their legal status in Canada. On a limited basis, workers can apply for an open work permit if they are considered vulnerable to abuse by the employer. Employers found to be non-compliant in this regard are either subjected to a monetary penalty or banned from hiring TFW for a period of time (Government of Canada, 2025b). Within the reasons for being flagged as non-compliant, the majority of employers listed for non-compliance are often flagged for not providing documentation for inspections or not actively engaging in the business for which the workers were hired and are charged a penalty. Moreover, in instances where employers do not adhere to established labour standards, workers may face heightened risks and may be dissuaded from reporting their concerns due to the threat of retaliation.

In addition to the IRCC and CBSA, the Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) is the federal authority in Canada responsible for overseeing or regulating the operation of the program (Government of Canada, 2025a). ESDC collaborates with IRCC, CBSA, as well as provincial and territorial governments, through appropriate information-sharing agreements, to monitor and exchange information that affects the integrity of the TFW Program. Additionally, the ESDC, via its Service Canada centres, issues a Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) to employers, which is a document that must be obtained before hiring migrant farm workers. In this process, Service Canada evaluates requests from employers seeking to hire temporary foreign workers and, in conjunction, performs Labour Market Impact Assessments to determine the potential impact that the employment of workers, including

Jamaican migrant farm workers, might have on the Canadian job market. Obtaining an LMIA confirms that there is a demand for a temporary foreign worker and that no Canadians or permanent residents are available to fill the position.

2.2.2. Government of Jamaica

Under the bilateral agreements between Canada and participating countries, foreign governments are responsible for several key aspects related to migrant farm workers. This includes selecting and recruiting the workers, ensuring they possess the required documents, maintaining a roster of qualified candidates, and designating representatives to support the workers while in Canada. Eligible workers must be at least 18 years old, citizens of the participating countries, and must comply with both Canadian immigration laws and the laws of their home countries, while also possessing experience in farming (Government of Canada, 2025a). The designated Jamaican government agency assigned to these responsibilities is the Rural Agriculture Development Authority (RADA). RADA, under Jamaica's Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, recruits and selects Jamaicans for the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program. Workers are licensed and trained as farmers through RADA and are assisted with the application process. Furthermore, RADA appoints liaison officers for the Jamaican Liaison Services (JLS) to support workers and employers in Canada. The Jamaican Liaison Service was established shortly after the commencement of the influx of Jamaican workers to Canada, with the intent of fostering a cooperative framework that would benefit both the workforce and employers. This initiative was jointly supported by the Canadian and Jamaican governments, both of which recognized the importance of having representatives of the Jamaican government present in Canada to oversee and support this labour migration program.

The primary objective of the Liaison Service is to safeguard the welfare of Jamaican workers while simultaneously facilitating the effective operational management of the employment program (Samuda, 2023). This dual focus aims to promote a mutually beneficial relationship between workers and employers. Central to the operations of the Liaison Service are the employment agreements established between workers and employers, which provide essential protections for all parties involved. Liaison Officers are tasked with conducting two visits to agricultural sites during the growing season to promote positive interactions and dialogue between employers and workers (Samuda, 2023). They are also tasked with addressing workplace concerns by launching targeted investigations in response to reported grievances, violations, noncompliance issues, or injuries. Liaison services are appointed by the foreign government, but some farmers have their own in-house liaison services.

2.2.3. Employer-Employee

Many farmers with large farms or operations take advantage of the opportunity provided by the government and apply to become a part of the SAWP. Farmers submit their LMIA via Service Canada, indicating the number of workers they need. Farmers also include a housing inspection completed by local health departments in their application to demonstrate that living conditions meet standards. Through the agreements, employers determine the working conditions, living conditions, wages, hours of work and duration of stay for the workers in Canada. Thus, farmers who the government approves to hire Jamaican migrant farm workers would have proven to the government that they do not have the needed support from the Canadian labour force to engage in their farm's operations. They would have additionally implied through their application that their labour relations are, in theory are in keeping with what the program outlines (e.g., a right to minimum wage) and that they are able to

accommodate workers upon arrival safely. Furthermore, upon hiring Jamaican migrant farm workers, farmers have the responsibility to ensure the well-being of the workers. However, in practice, many farmers choose whether to comply with government regulations.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

3.1. Research Design

My research methodology utilized a mixed-method approach that incorporates qualitative and quantitative data collection: semi-structured interviews, structured surveys and literature reviews. It implements a case study focused on Jamaican migrant farm workers who are a part of the SAWP. These methods used allow for gathering comprehensive and diverse data from Jamaican migrant farm worker participants and scholars that can contribute to a deeper understanding of the experiences of migrant farm workers and potential policy/agreement reform. Data collection was done in two parts, with a start and end date from November 2024 to March 2025. Data was collected in two parts during this time. The first part was conducted in Ontario, while the second part was conducted in Jamaica. Data was gathered from workers and stakeholders (advocates and educators) in the food and agricultural industry, primarily Jamaican migrant farm workers aged 18 and above. The research methodology, including recruitment, prioritized anonymity, safety, and consent.

3.2. Sampling and Participants

The population of focus for this research is Jamaican migrant farm workers. Jamaica was the first country in the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program and has what some workers consider “the lion’s share” of the other Caribbean states. Approximately 9,000 Jamaicans come to Canada yearly on the SAWP. Participants from the program were recruited through a mix of

techniques. The first technique involved an email script that was used for outreach primarily in Ontario. A script was drafted to allow participants to read what the research involves, and an invitation to participate if they choose to. The script highlights the recognition of consent in participating in the research and that no penalties are involved if they should choose to withdraw at any point in the process. The second technique was used in Ontario and Jamaica. This technique was snowballing with the support of organizations and advocacy groups such as Justicia for Migrant Workers (J4MW) and Rural Agriculture Development Authority (RADA), who, with research recruitment as outlined in the email script. J4MW assisted through communication streams, including social media groups, to interested workers in Ontario and Jamaica. The Rural Agricultural Development Agency (RADA), which regulates farmer identification and is involved in the farm worker registration process, recruited workers who were in Jamaica and added an element of accessibility, as the surveys were printed for those who did not have access to a computer. Other recruitment methods involved the distribution of printed flyers at agricultural stores in Jamaica. Altogether, these techniques helped to identify interested farm workers while also respecting their privacy, especially in Ontario, where the community is more vulnerable than in Jamaica.

Interview data were obtained from 4 Jamaican farm workers through interviews. In addition, interview data were also collected from an advocate and educator, for a total of 5 interviews. As interviews share personal stories of potentially vulnerable workers, anonymity is respected. I refer to interview participants in this report as Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, Participant 4 and Participant 5, to protect their identity. Survey data were obtained from 35 farm workers, which helps to gather further data on the Jamaican workers' experiences.

3.3. Data Collection Methods

Arrangements for data collection were made with workers within the food and agricultural industry, primarily focused on Jamaican migrant farm workers 18 years old and above. This process implemented a robust mixed-method approach to data collection, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods to gather insights into the experiences, challenges, and perspectives of Jamaican migrant farm workers in the Canadian agri-food industry and to understand the viewpoints of key stakeholders involved in the Jamaican-Canadian food system. Three methods were employed:

The first method encompassed academic and grey literature reviews, which were used throughout the research on migrant farm workers. This review allowed for a historical overview and identified knowledge availability and gaps in research. It also allowed for a cross-analysis of data to ensure credibility, relevance, comparisons in data production, and evidence-based recommendations.

Second, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 5 stakeholders, including Jamaican migrant farm workers and Canadian agricultural industry advocates and educators. These interviews provided flexibility for exploring diverse themes related to the research topic while ensuring that key areas of interest are covered. The narratives gathered firsthand data and gave voice to Jamaican migrant farm workers, providing deep insights into their experiences. Open-ended questions encouraged interviewees to express their thoughts freely, contributing to a rich and comprehensive data collection process. The questions fostered a deeper understanding of their perspectives and challenges. I utilized audio technology, including computer applications like Zoom and a recording app, to capture interview data for notes and data comparison. The

audio recording assisted with note-taking, cross-checking data and analyzing materials to gather insights, narratives, and perspectives that shed light on the migrant workers' lived realities.

Third, I distributed structured questionnaires to Jamaican migrant farm workers to gather quantitative and qualitative data on key aspects of the research topic. These surveys were administered using *Qualtrics*, distributed via emails to worker organizations, assistance from agricultural agencies, social media groups and printed flyers posted at agricultural stores in Jamaica. This approach aided in data collection from 35 participants. The survey captures demographic information, lived experiences of workers in Canada and some of their most impactful challenges, actions they believe can improve their experience in Canada and some of their biggest accomplishments in from being a part of the SAWP. Data gathered from the survey helped to identify patterns and trends in the research results. This method provided a broad understanding of the dynamics and interactions within the agricultural industry, supplementing other qualitative methods used in the research.

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

To analyze the interview responses from the Jamaican migrant farm workers, I adopted a thematic analysis approach, which allowed for an in-depth exploration of the various themes that emerged from the participants' narratives. I began by thoroughly transcribing the interviews and reviewing the transcripts multiple times to familiarize myself with the content, understanding the nuances of each participant's experience. Next, I generated initial codes from the data, identifying key phrases, concepts, and repeated ideas from the responses, such as “financial incentives,” “surveillance,” “illusion of obligations,” and “worker support.” I found about 50 comparative and contrasting codes. After coding, I grouped similar codes into broader themes

addressing my research questions. I then interpreted the themes, examining how they related to one another and what they revealed about the overall experience of migrant workers, such as the interaction between financial motivation for coming to Canada and the emotional challenges faced upon arrival. To strengthen the analysis, I contextualized the findings with existing literature on migrant labour and rural work experiences, situating the workers' narratives within a broader context and comparing the findings with similar studies. Finally, I drew conclusions from the analysis, discussing implications for policy and practice, including suggestions for improving working conditions for seasonal workers and recommendations for support systems (e.g., tools workers strongly believe can support them) that acknowledged workers' unique challenges. Following this analysis approach allowed the findings to reflect individual experiences while contributing to a deeper understanding of the systemic issues faced by migrant farm workers, leading to potential avenues for advocacy and change.

Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion

4.1. Survey Data

I obtained survey data from thirty-five (35) participants, including thirty-two (32) males and three (3) females, between the ages of 18 and 65. Among the reasons for participating in the SAWP, including for financial stability, to support family, limited employment options in Jamaica, to lease land, to learn about agricultural technology and because it was recommended, 80% or twenty-eight (28) participants included their reason as for financial support and to support their family, 31% was attributed to limited employment options, 22% was due to recommendations by others, 14.3% was to acquire land and learn about agricultural technology. Furthermore, I inquired if the program helped them to support their family, have sufficient

income, acquire land and learn about new farming technology. From this inquiry, 54.3% of participants responded with supporting their families as one of the supports the program provided. Furthermore, 31.4% were supported with sufficient income, 22.9% responded that the program contributed to farming technology knowledge, and 11.4% or four (4) participants responded that the program has helped them acquire land.

Participants were asked if their work on the SAWP in Canada helped them to specifically lease or purchase land in their home country. 10 participants were able to purchase land, while 6 were able to lease land and 19 were neither able to purchase nor lease land in Jamaica. Subsequently, Participants were asked if they used technology on the farm; many responded that they do not use technology. However, when asked to select technologies they use on the farms, the following were listed: tractors, mobile phones, farm satellites, temperature and moisture sensors, GPS, farm applications and software. The following inquiry asks how often the listed technologies are used, with 16 participants noting use a few times per week, 12 participants noting every day and 5 participants noted never. Subsequently, it was asked if surveillance cameras were present on the farms they work, to which 22 participants responded with no and 13 participants responded with yes.

Furthermore, the Jamaican migrant farm workers provided insights into their experiences in the Canadian agricultural program, highlighting issues of racism, isolation, and community acceptance. Most responses were neutral, with varying levels of agreement and disagreement (i.e., strongly agree, somewhat agree, neutral, somewhat disagree and strongly disagree). On frequent experiences of racism in the work environment, 17 neither agreed nor disagreed, while overall 12 agreed, 6 disagreed, and some expressed disagreement. Similarly, 24 participants felt neutral about isolation, with 7 agreeing and 4 disagreeing. When asked about feeling valued in

the agricultural community, 16 were neutral, and other responses showed 12 in agreement and 7 in disagreement. Regarding whether employers made positive changes in response to concerns, 17 were neutral, 10 were in agreement, and 8 were in disagreement; however, none strongly agreed. In terms of feeling welcomed by the community, the majority were neutral, with 8 indicating agreement and 7 indicating disagreement. Finally, concerning experiences of racism from the community off the farm, again, most participants were neutral, with 20 indicating neutral, 7 indicating agreement and 8 indicating disagreement.

In terms of living conditions, work safety conditions, physical health, mental health and overall experience, with responses ranging from poor, fair, good, very good and excellent, majority of workers responded with good; safety conditions, physical health, living conditions and overall experience got more than half responses as “good”, however mental health varied mostly with 14 “good” responses, and 12 “fair” responses, 2 very “good” responses, 4 “excellent” responses and 3 “poor” responses.

Among the challenges Jamaican migrant farm workers face, language barriers, pressure to perform, long hours, not being paid well, racism/discrimination, and not being able to voice their concerns stood out as some of the major concerns, with pressure to perform and language barriers standing out as the top two.

Furthermore, participants were asked to rate actions from 1 to 10 (lowest to highest importance) on whether they would serve to improve their experience in the SAWP. Participants responded the strongest to access to affordable education and skills-building programs, improved access to employee benefits, access to long-term residency, improved legal protection and labour

rights, more Jamaican Liaison officers, with improved legal protection and labour rights and more access to affordable education and skills-building programs being the top two.

Finally, participants shared their major accomplishments from the SAWP, including supporting their family (e.g., sending children to school), a better financial situation or standard of living, obtaining Permanent Residency in Canada, access to housing or home improvement, savings, purchasing a vehicle, and livestock and seed purchase.

4.2. Interview Data

Similar to survey data, interview participants recall varying experiences of living conditions while working on farms in Ontario. Participant 1, who has been on the SAWP for two consecutive years, describes his experience in Canada as sometimes rough, stressful, and pressuring, but otherwise enjoyable because of the people he works with. His toughest time is in the winter season when he comes to Canada and spring is not yet here, but he is also not fond of the summer temperatures in Ontario. He described his living conditions as fair and added that the farmer's readiness to ensure workers are living comfortably is one of many conditions on the farm that are fair. He stated, "When it comes down to satisfaction with the living quarters, it is comfortable staying there. My boss tries to make sure everyone is living comfortably. Where we live, there are 6 or 7 bunkhouses, and everyone has their own room, and everyone has their own little section in the kitchen. The only things we do share are the stove and maybe the microwave. And if anyone is living in a home that is not comfortable, it doesn't matter if it's Mexican, Jamaican, Chinese, he will push it 100% to let his workers live comfortably."

Another participant adds to the prior perspective. Participant 5, who has worked on the SAWP for over 30 years and comes to Ontario yearly to support his family, comments on his

first few years on the program as tough due to his experience with his employer and living conditions being horrible. He claims that the beds were not suitable, the stove was shared between 12 people, with only one or two burners of the stove working many times, along with no washers or dryers for clothing. He mentions that workers had a set time to go to work and prepare meals. He remarked that, “Because of this, you did not eat well, sometimes the inconvenience of time only dry foods.” He has been on multiple farms in the past, and the experiences have been different among the different farms. He shared that his current farm has these amenities and up-to-standard bunk houses, which have helped to make his experience better. He said, “When you can relax with a comfortable bed and a proper stove to prepare your meals, it is a pleasure.” He further comments that “If you don’t get a good night’s sleep, you can’t perform well when you go to work.” He believes that the poor living conditions are common across various farms and that there are even worse conditions that others experience. He knows of a neighbouring farm that is not fit for living. He feels that poor living conditions would have reduced the length of time he is in the program.

Participant 4, who is a second-generation farm worker, is currently experiencing poor living conditions on the Ontario farm he works. He describes a room filled with bunk beds and nowhere to store your personal belongings, where many use the bunk beds as a sleeping space and storage. He further commented on a lack of safe food storage facilities, “There were no secure lockers to store your items. Food was being stolen after shopping for your groceries.” The workers share refrigerators where they store food. Still, Participant 4 believes this practice is unsafe because of the lack of trust among workers, especially when conflicts take place on the farm – “Yuh don’t know weh somebody would do to your food.” He exclaimed that there is a need for the protection of personal items and food in the living spaces.

As regards working conditions, farmers' need to produce has enabled unfair working conditions. In this light, participants have had more negative experiences than positive. What stood out across the individual participants was their shared experience in being pressured to perform tasks given by the farmers, accompanied by discrimination and deportation threats. In these scenarios, Participants often remarked on liaison officers as a necessary role. Participant 1 shared a statement about how his boss treats his country people during work, "I would say my boss speaks to my people or deals with my people differently from other races in certain situations. This all comes down to how the liaison officer dealt with situations with reference to the farm workers and the farm bosses." He also pointed to there being a preference for those who perform to the employer's expectation, but further commented that expectations of the farmer are biased. For instance, he shares that at the farm he works in Ontario, staff shortages occur due to production demands, especially during peak times for crops like cabbage and cauliflower. Typically, four people work on a tractor—one driver and three cutters. However, during high production with fewer workers, the farmer may assign only two people to do the same amount of work expected from four. He continued by comparing specific situations where the farmer treats other specific groups on the farm differently, with performance expectations. "If a Jamaican worker and the driver went on the tractor to reap cabbage with the same time schedule as four persons and didn't get the same amount as four persons, it would be a problem for the farmer. If two Mexican workers who went on the tractor and don't make the amount that the boss has required in the same time schedule as four workers, it is no problem. Whenever I personally would ask my boss, I would say, 'Boss, why? Two guys don't make the same amount as four guys with the same schedule, and it's a problem. Why?' My boss would reply and say, 'You are Jamaican, you are stronger. The Mexican guy has no power.' So, I think that is unfair." He

remarks that the expectation from the farmer is not just and alludes to common sense in knowing that two workers cannot reap what four workers would reap in the same time, or else the workers place a lot of pressure on themselves and can cause harm. He loves what he does, but the tasks are too much. It remarks that it is mentally draining, but he does it because he has to. What makes work fun for him and his colleagues is friendly competition among themselves in farm tasks like harvesting to cover up the pressure they feel. The games are played to meet performance expectations, and the social incentive makes the job more bearable for Participant 1.

Participant 3, who has been in the program once in the last ten years, has suffered major repercussions due to injury while working on a farm in Ontario, shared his experience of being treated unfairly in the relationship with his employer. He stated, “We are treated very poorly and are not seen as human. We are seen as a number. We don’t even use our name. We are given a number that we have to study.” Migrant farm workers are assigned a number before arriving in Canada that is used to log in workers and track them. He compares the use of this number and colonial practices – “I experienced modern-day slavery,” he said. “It is tied to you and used to surveil you. You can’t go anywhere without the number,” he continued. Workers on the farm began self-naming because of being referred to as a number, making nicknames for each other, as is a common practice in Jamaica. In the *Contract for Employment in Canada of Commonwealth Caribbean Seasonal Agricultural Workers*, under the *Scope and Period of Employment*, the sixth agreement makes a specific request that employers not name workers until after a trial period of work. Trial periods are from 7 (i.e., if transferred) to 14 working days, after which workers are given their identity back. The agreement goes on to state that employers must not discharge workers unless they refuse to work or engage in misconduct during the trial period. Furthermore, Participant 3 experienced long workdays extending to 18 hours, where he harvested

crops during the day and packed them during the night. He believes that employers use Jamaican migrant farm workers for growth, while being abusive, disrespectful and “expecting workers to be as fast as lightning,” then dispose of them when injured. “When injured, that is it for you. You don’t come back if you don’t work fast enough. You cannot work for someone else because of the agreements.” He compares the feeling to that of being owned by the employer. Through work permits issued by the relevant governments of Canada, workers are tied to a single employer. The limitations imposed by this relationship make workers feel confined. The participant revealed a concerning trend regarding fatalities on farms, particularly in Ontario. One worker shared his experience of suffering a lifelong injury on the job without any repercussions for the employers involved. He emphasized that deaths among migrant workers occur each year, yet these incidents rarely make it into media reports. When questioning the availability of records related to these deaths, the participant indicated that such information is deliberately concealed from the public, suggesting that the actual numbers are greater than widely recognized. Moreover, the systemic exclusion faced by injured workers is apparent; once they sustain an injury on a farm, they are often sent back to their home countries to confront the aftermath of their injuries alone. This situation is compounded by their exclusion from Employment Insurance (Ramsaroop, 2014) and their limited access to healthcare, further emphasizing their marginalization within the societal and legal frameworks.

Participant 5 believes the biggest threat to workers from farmers is the risk of being sent back to their homeland, which makes workers fear speaking up. Participant 5 stated that farmers will make remarks along the lines of “if you don’t want to work, if you don’t want this condition, don’t worry about it, I can ship you on the next flight and tomorrow you will see your brother coming up.” He says workers have no say; they can never stand up to their boss and tell them

that they are wrong. He has had experiences with both good and bad employers and believes that accountability must be implemented in chains of communication, no matter the employment dynamic. “If the worker is wrong, then they are wrong; equally, if bosses are wrong, then they are wrong.” However, he states that the opposite has happened. “If the boss is wrong, the worker gets sent home or never returns to the program in future. Consequences must be fair. Liaisons must sit with both parties during an issue.”

4.2.1. Digitization-Specific Findings

Participants in the study were asked about their regular use of various technological tools and systems on the farm, including satellite and drone imaging, surveillance cameras, GPS-guided machinery (such as tractors), robotics, mobile phones, and farm management applications. The findings indicated that all interviewed workers encountered some form of technology, whether through direct engagement or indirect exposure. This included the use of mobile phones, management applications, tractors, and surveillance cameras.

Notably, Participant 4 and Participant 5 reported a lack of interaction with these technologies in their work, indicating a preference for more traditional, manual labour involving the use of their hands, gloves, and occasionally clippers, as well as equipment such as baskets or containers for harvesting crops, including strawberries, tomatoes, and apples. In contrast, Participants 1 and 3 reported utilizing mobile phone applications on a daily basis while working on the farm. Specifically, Participant 1 employed mobile applications to monitor weather conditions, stating, “We use our cell phones as often as possible to check the weather based on the season of the year. Sometimes we check the weather to determine what outfit to wear on the farm, the amount of liquid to bring, or the type of food to bring for our coffee break.” This

allows workers to prepare as best they can to work in the field, given the weather conditions. He further elaborated that after checking the weather, “Sometimes we bring it to the farmer's attention. Based on our experience, we know what to do with the forecast. We prepare ourselves to get the task done.” Participant 3 also reported the use of mobile phones for work-related purposes, including signing in through an application, whereas farm management apps are used to track workers.

The surveillance technology on the farms garnered significant comments from participants. All interviewees acknowledged the presence of surveillance cameras on the farm. Participant 1 noted that while there are many cameras in his residential area (i.e., the bunkhouse), his working environment is devoid of them. He indicated that he had never encountered complaints from fellow workers regarding the surveillance systems and personally did not harbour issues with the cameras, recognizing the necessity for monitoring due to various risks faced by workers. Conversely, Participant 5 acknowledged the commonality of cameras on the farm but indicated their relative scarcity around the bunkhouse. Reflecting on his extensive experience in the program over the past 30 years, he reminisced about a time when surveillance was less pervasive in farms across Ontario. He suggested that the increasing presence of cameras serves to monitor workers’ movements, such as the leaving and entering of the farm, and adherence to farm regulations, though he opined that employers often do not disclose the rationale behind their use or the purpose of surveillance systems. He remarked, “Workers will hear about what has happened from employers, but no telling how they heard about what has happened.” Despite his own indifference towards the cameras, he noted a prevalent negative sentiment among farm workers, particularly concerning the covert placement of some cameras, which can be difficult to detect.

Participant 4 similarly indicated a considerable presence of cameras on the farm and conjectured that employers may have removed bicycles from the premises following an incident captured on video. He asserted that the primary motivation for installing cameras is to evaluate workers' integrity, suggesting a lack of trust from employers who may suspect dishonesty among staff, thereby using surveillance to ascertain the truth of such suspicions.

Participant 3 expressed that technology has made working more difficult. “You are constantly under surveillance. There is no freedom of movement or freedom of speech. It does not make you feel safer; it just reinforces the awareness that you are being watched. You have to keep moving constantly.” He illustrated this point by describing how tractors would follow workers in the field as a means of pressure: “The way they let you know you are moving too slowly is by constantly driving the tractor behind you. If you don’t move quickly, they drive the tractor close to you, and that’s their way of indicating you are too slow.” This illustrates that technology, such as tractors, can be utilized both ethically and unethically to increase production. Instead of serving purely as tools for farm operations, they can also create a sense of fear and pressure workers to harvest crops more quickly.

Further to machinery, Participant 3 highlighted that most tractors on the farm are manual, except for the more advanced GPS-guided tractor used by the farmer. Participant 1 remarks on the use of tractors by workers; these tractors are not GPS-guided, however, they are not like tractors in Jamaica, as they can take on more terrains and weather conditions.

Participant 1 explained that productivity tracking is conducted by his Asian employers. Another participant mentioned that scientists use technology for seeding and planting crops in a seeding room, after which farm workers manually transplant the seedlings.

Participant 2, a former migrant farm worker turned educator and advocate for migrant worker rights, expressed another layer of digitization. He asked a moral question: “Has technology helped to decrease the cost of food?” Highlighting how the cost of food from technological advancements has yet to decrease to allow equal access for everyone. He then compares it to the outcome of the green revolution in oppressing the global south. Shifting to technology surveillance, Participant 2 notes that the use of technology advantages employers, as it gives greater control over their operations. This, he claims, places the health of workers in the hands of those who are prioritizing profits while employers remove any safeguards. He recalls his experience working on a farm in Ontario, where he had to “clock” everything he did. This was done through a tracking system used by farmers among farm workers, where a board was displayed, capturing how well each individual was performing. Best performers were at the top of the board, and workers had to continue exceeding previous expectations. He recalls beginning to use energy drinks, working earlier, showering in less time and missing breaks to meet his employer’s expectations. To this, he says, “The likelihood of being hurt becomes a real threat. “There are verbal threats that people are waiting to take your jobs. Charts are posted weekly, but other farms are posting them daily. The workers at the base are sent back to the bunk house. This means they get no pay and possibly get sent home. Everyone has to be working at the same pace - the human factor is removed. Another way it is removed is in how the farms are isolated, no trespassing, no visits, no outsiders. It is carefully designed for this. This prevents workers from having outside access. It creates an environment where workers feel as though no one will be there to help them.

4.2.2. Consolidation-Specific Findings

Participants shared varied perspectives on the impact of consolidation in the agricultural sector, particularly regarding labour dynamics and land ownership. The findings underscore the complex interplay between consolidation, worker rights, and land ownership, revealing significant implications for the future of small farmers and migrant labourers in the agricultural sector. Participant 3 remarked that there is a continual expansion of larger farms, and further noted that there are no restrictions on land acquisition, indicating a trend towards increasing consolidation that could further disadvantage smaller producers. Participant 1 adds to the statement of Participant 3 in his expressed belief that consolidation, while negatively impacting smaller farmers, does not negatively affect labour conditions. In drawing from observations of his employer and the farms around him, he shared that smaller farms struggle to compete in quality and quantity against larger operations. Larger farms are perceived as more marketable, enabling them to meet customer demands more effectively. He implies that the dynamic leads to smaller farms losing market share, as larger entities often purchase the smaller farms to expand operations and increase yields. He expressed that consolidation does not negatively impact the labour of Jamaican workers, but instead leads to more production and would ultimately result in more job opportunities for Jamaican migrant farm workers, including more available work hours.

A separate opinion from Participant 2 contrasted the land ownership and status experiences of coloured workers with those of Europeans, highlighting discriminatory practices that affect land ownership and employment status. He stated that “Europeans were granted a pathway and land upon entry. This practice stopped when coloured workers began entering. Coloured workers do not even get status upon arrival.” He connected experiences of land ownership and status to closed work permits and working for one employer because they come

for fixed periods of time, whereas there is no status which gives an open work permit. Without status, he states that workers are “denied rights, excluded from protection and tied to employers.” Participant 4 and 5 shared their own experiences regarding land access. Participant 4 reported having land prior to participating in the SAWP and is actively investing in it by purchasing seeds and livestock. However, despite ongoing agricultural activities in Ontario, concerns were raised about the future of their crops in Jamaica during periods of absence. The seasonality of the SAWP prevents farm workers, many of whom farm in Jamaica, from attending to their own crops when they are called to return to the program, interrupting their production and causing them to adapt to farming mostly during their return home.

Participant 5 also illustrated a more personal narrative of land ownership, indicating partial ownership of government land in Jamaica and highlighting a positive transformation in land access facilitated by working for many years on the SAWP. Their previous farming experience informed their approach to land and agricultural investment. Furthermore, the issue of land ownership in Jamaica was raised by other participants, specifically regarding the National Housing Trust (NHT), a Jamaican government program to facilitate land and homeownership. Participant 1 pointed out that current deductions made from workers’ wages for the NHT program do not extend to migrant workers, which limits their ability to acquire land or homeownership upon returning to Jamaica. This raises questions about government support for these workers in facilitating access to housing through systems like the NHT.

4.2.3. Financialization-Specific Findings

The research revealed several significant insights regarding the financialization of the agri-food sector and its implications for both workers and the economy. It revealed growing business influence on agri-food, worker well-being and labour exploitation, impact of financialization on consumerism and economic limitations, business domination and labour trends.

Participant 5 highlighted the disparity faced by agricultural workers in Canada and Jamaica. He noted that the financialization of agriculture benefits business owners and governments, given that when there are greater investments in agriculture and leads to program expansion, which impacts the spending power of migrant workers, directing it to both the Canadian and Jamaican economies. The income earned by these workers is reinvested in their surrounding communities, showing that the economic cycle is deeply interconnected. However, this also leads to a dynamic where farm workers feel compelled to work harder under the pressure of financial insecurity and living costs during their employment. Workers often endure long hours without overtime pay, leading to significant profits for employers. Participant 2 suggests that dependency on employers raises alarms about potential abuses of power, as the industry controls food distribution as a means of exerting control over populations. Many workers reported minimal profit after significant deductions, such as taxes and living expenses, limiting their financial capability upon their return home, reflecting the insufficiency of compensation structures for workers' agricultural labour. Participant 4 described earning approximately \$600,000 Jamaican dollars, which amounts to about \$5,500 Canadian dollars over a work period. From this income, there were deductions including rent and food, and

sending remittances back home for his family. After the expenses, he went to Jamaica with only \$150,000 Jamaican dollars, which is roughly \$1,000 Canadian Dollars.

Further insights came as Participant 1 emphasized the increasing productivity of Canadian agriculture, particularly in Ontario, where a substantial portion of produce is exported, especially during the winter months. The participant shared their perspective on how Ontario farms contribute to food sovereignty. He shared contrasting implications of farmworkers' contributions, stating that food sovereignty is more possible because workers grow what Ontario citizens want, but added to that statement by saying that many Ontario farms export food to the US as well, depending on quantity and quality, increasing food sovereignty for the general North American region. In contrast, and suggested by the previous statement, he opines that farm work does not support food sovereignty in Jamaica, as the foods grown on farms in Ontario are not the typical Jamaican diet, and Jamaicans grow what they eat. He further believes that the growing influence of businesses in Ontario's agri-food industry is positive for the industry and further leads to exports because it drives more production and economic growth, a view shared by other participants. Larger farms, driven by financialization, often acquire smaller farms, which further consolidates economic power in the sector. Participant 2 further raised concerns about the centralization of food systems, where a few corporations exert control over agricultural production, advocating for a more decentralized approach to food distribution to mitigate these risks.

4.3. Discussion

4.3.1. *Limitations*

As a researcher, it is imperative to remain cognizant of these ethical considerations throughout the writing process, ensuring that adherence to ethical standards extends beyond data collection to encompass the representation of these narratives. In undertaking the representation of workers' narratives, several limitations became apparent. A primary concern lies in achieving cohesion while accurately depicting the individual experiences of these Jamaican migrant farm workers without compromising their authenticity, livelihood, or safety. The practice of strategic anonymity raises ethical dilemmas regarding what information to include or exclude, as well as how to modify language while preserving the original meaning. This bears a significant responsibility to handle sensitive information with integrity, recognizing that the trust of the participants is paramount. This approach fosters a more responsible and respectful discourse about workers' experiences, upholding their dignity and promoting a broader understanding of their circumstances.

Moreover, not all workers were willing to engage in discourse, often due to concerns for their own protection. This can be observed in the neutrality of responses, which I will discuss further in later sub-sections. Among those who chose to voice their experiences, many remain reticent, fearing repercussions that could jeopardize their employment or, in extreme instances, their lives. However, it is noteworthy that a subset of workers expressed a desire to share their stories, motivated by the belief that their testimonies could assist others facing similar challenges. This willingness underscores a faith in the potential for research to drive change.

4.3.2. Labour Relationship Impacts

Many workers appreciate the economic opportunities provided by the SAWP, as these jobs allow them to support their families back in Jamaica. However, while in Canada, workers also face challenges, including isolation, precarious living and working conditions, and closed work permits, which can significantly affect their overall well-being. These challenges are perpetuated by the government agreements that bind Jamaican workers and Canadian farmers, while ostensibly aimed at addressing labour shortages, have engendered a troubling set of practices that have been characterized as unethical. This raises the question: for whom were these agreements actually made?

In the survey, the social dynamics and challenges that these workers face while abroad resulted in mixed responses regarding feelings of safety, isolation, and discrimination, indicating a complex environment that impacts their overall experience. Concerning experiences of racism and discrimination, survey participants indicated these experiences on and off Ontario farms. Responses were met with a high level of neutrality among participants. While 48.6% of participants indicated a “neutral” response about racism on farms, 34.3% expressed experiencing racism on farms, while 17.1% expressed not experiencing racism on farms. Similarly, 57.1% of respondents reported a “neutral” experience of racism off farms, 20% reported experiencing racism off farms, and 22.9% reported not experiencing racism off farms. Similar patterns persisted when accounting for inequity treatments on the farm. Participant neutrality in surveys came away as an interesting finding from the data revision. The significant number of neutral responses highlights broader power dynamics and vulnerabilities faced by immigrant workers on the farms. As migrant farm workers are often placed in precarious jobs and are often threatened as disposable upon non-compliance, this neutrality suggests uncertainty about voicing strong

opinions, out of fear of repercussions from employers. For instance, neutral responses regarding experiences of racism, isolation, and feeling valued may indicate a reluctance to express dissent, stemming from concerns over job security, retaliation, or deportation. Workers might avoid disclosing their true feelings about discrimination, fearing that open negativity could jeopardize their employment or increase their vulnerability. Employers, through closed work permits, determine if a worker returns to the program each season. At the time of survey distribution, many Jamaican farm workers were awaiting their callback from Liaison officers. This is a reminder of how power is placed in employers' hands, as the livelihoods of the farm workers are not promised each season.

The complex environment described in the survey indicates that workers navigate a delicate balance between safety and job preservation. This can lead to a neutral stance instead of openly discussing their experiences, contributing to a culture of fear and silence surrounding discrimination. A neutral stance on issues may indicate that workers are unsure whether their experiences are typical or if they should be more vocal about their concerns. Furthermore, the lack of clear consensus in these responses points to varied experiences that may resist simple categorization. Moreover, such neutrality may signal disenfranchisement, where workers feel that expressing dissatisfaction would be ignored or futile. This pattern underscores the need for better support systems and communication within the SAWP. The inability to articulate strong feelings highlights systemic issues that require proactive engagement with workers' concerns. The prevalence of neutral responses reflects a challenging environment where ambivalence and fear inhibit workers from fully expressing their experiences and needs.

Contrastingly, interviews were more vocal about experiences of discrimination and inequities. These experiences were reflected in instances of discrimination that influenced

production. For example, Participant 1 mentioned feeling pressure to perform due to biased perceptions that Jamaicans are stronger than Mexicans and can complete more work in less time. This alludes to a biased assumption that Jamaican workers possess greater physical strength compared to Mexican workers, that physical strength is a characteristic among races and a beneficial means for exploitation by farmers. This supports the critical lens of racial capitalism by fostering an environment where different ethnicities are classified based on racial biases, which are then used to maximize production. In this case, a bias suggesting that Jamaican people possess greater physical strength for labouring, as depicted by the enslavement and forced labour of people of colour during colonization. Farmers with the same perception may be inclined to hire Jamaican farm workers to exploit them for labour power, while not treating them as humanely as other racial groups, creating racial hierarchies on the farm surrounding workers' abilities to maximize production. As I examine political structures and concepts that could have created this bias, I compare this experience with Christina Sharpe's racial capitalism connection in the "wake" of the modern disregard for Black bodies in the post-colonial era (Sharpe, 2016). Jamaica, being a previous colony, would be situated in the aftermath of slavery, whereas previous generations of Jamaicans, primarily from Africa, were transported to work in agriculture on plantations. Today, Jamaican migrant workers experience the proletarian version of similar work environments. That is, Jamaican migrant farm workers are exported to another country to work on farms where exploitation of physical endurance is used to produce crops for farmers' profits.

The Jamaican migrant farm worker community, in the "wake" of slavery, would experience the disregard for Black well-being (Sharpe, 2016). Sharpe (2016) argues the lived experiences of Black individuals, asserting that their lives continue to be situated "near death" in

the aftermath of slavery. This perspective implies that there exists a pervasive lack of concern for the Black community, extending to extreme consequences such as death. In situations like this, workers can be pushed by employers to work until the point of harm or, even, death, as remarked by Participant 3. While Sharpe (2016, p. 7) articulates that “Black deaths are produced as normative,” this reality opens up significant gaps in how the legal system’s response further exacerbates these issues, as it fails to recognize Black justice, often meeting it with exclusion and mortality as a normative state (Sharpe, 2016).

In correlation with the modern relationship between farmers and Jamaican migrant farm workers, Binford (2019) refers to a specific power dynamic in the arrangement he calls “grower power”—the relationship between employers (i.e., farmers) and stakeholders, including workers and intermediaries (i.e., the Canadian and Jamaican governments). In this case study, grower power is evident in the relationship between farmers and Jamaican migrant farm workers in the pursuit of capitalist goals, which manifests in challenges workers highlight, like pressure to perform, long hours, insufficient pay, racism, and not being able to voice their concerns.

Moreover, the relationship between farmers and Jamaican migrant farm workers is particularly intensified by closed work permits, which tie migrant workers to particular employers. This arrangement effectively empowers employers to set the terms of employment, making workers more susceptible to exploitation and increasing their silence out of fear of deportation (Lee, 2015; Binford, 2019). As a result, the power dynamics are heavily skewed in favour of farmers, as closed work permits prioritize their interests while greatly limiting workers’ choices. Thomas (2016) argues that these conditions often strip workers of the same rights that Canadian citizens and residents have. This situation highlights a significant gap in the existing policies that should protect the rights and welfare of migrant workers, who could benefit from

alternatives like open work permits or pathways to permanent residency. Lee (2015) and Binford (2019) emphasize that closed work permits further shackle migrant workers to specific employers, limiting their freedom of choice and rendering them vulnerable to exploitation. The threat of deportation often contributes to a culture of silence among workers, exacerbating their precarious circumstances. At a broader scale, the government emerges as a powerful player in the migrant worker-employer relationship. Governmental policies are essential in shaping the structures that govern labour relations in agriculture. While farmers may directly influence the working conditions of farmworkers, it is ultimately political decisions that enforce compliance and uphold the status quo of the food system (Allahdua & Dunsworth, 2023). This governance gap signifies a lack of oversight within Canada, complicating efforts to regulate and monitor the treatment of migrant workers.

Additionally, the agreements highlight a troubling pattern in how accountability is shared, mainly exonerating the host country and employers from their obligations. Instead, they shift the responsibility onto the source country and the workers, effectively minimizing protections for Jamaicans isolated to farms in a foreign land. Although liaison officers are supposedly in place as government representatives, the power dynamic between employers and liaisons tends to favour employers in order to secure their own jobs, dismantling active mitigation measures for farm workers' rights and freedoms (Binford, 2019).

Another dynamic displayed through the SAWP at the international level is the interaction between larger economies and smaller nations that supply migrant labour, struggling to balance power in keeping larger nations compliant. Binford (2019) notes that fear of economic repercussions often inhibits smaller countries from advocating for their citizens. This situation resembles the way Jamaican Liaison Officers place their nation's workforce at the mercy of

employers due to the fear of losing their jobs. This dynamic is poignantly encapsulated in a statement by a Mexican worker in *Harvesting Freedom*, who noted, “when the larger countries sneeze, the small countries get sick” (Allahdua & Dunsworth, 2023, p. 138), which highlights the coercive nature of international economic relations that perpetuates compliance among smaller economies driven by fears of job loss and economic instability. The literature presents a compelling argument that, despite the varying interests of stakeholders—including farmworkers, governments, and farmers—capital remains the focal point of concern at all levels. It is observed that for farm workers, this capital is a lifeline that supports families, while for governments and farmers, it sustains economic stability and capital accumulation. However, the human cost associated with labour practices often significantly outweighs the monetary benefits derived from such inequities.

Additionally, the political landscape plays a significant role in enabling the inequities faced by these workers. The agreements enforce compliance, which should be a two-way street. Governments possess the political authority to reform policies and ensure compliance. Such policies are crucial for fostering fairness in the allocation of rights, food, and capital. Consequently, these regulations can either hinder or promote unethical behaviours among direct and indirect participants, like farmers and grocery chains. It is clear that there are various relationships that leave farmworkers vulnerable. The lack of frequent and effective representation between Jamaican migrant farm workers and employers complicates the monitoring and regulation of worker treatment. While this recognition urges a reevaluation of policies to ensure that workers' rights are prioritized over mere economic interest, as the consequences of exploitation extend far beyond material gain, it is challenging in the context of racial capitalism. Reevaluating policies designed to protect labour rights can lead to significant

improvements in working conditions, wage equity, and access to resources for marginalized populations. However, the historical context of proletarianism, within the context of racial capitalism, raises critical questions about the depth and sustainability of such changes within a capitalist economy. While policy interventions may yield immediate benefits, they operate within the confines of an existing capitalist structure that prioritizes profit maximization over the welfare of workers. This raises concerns about the efficacy of policy reform as a standalone solution to migrant labour exploitation. The persistence of capitalist incentives can undermine the effectiveness of regulatory frameworks intended to protect racialized or marginalized workers. Consequently, while policies can address specific injustices and enhance protections, they may not fundamentally alter the exploitative nature of labour relations inherent in capitalist economies.

4.3.3. Digitization Impacts

While technology is becoming increasingly prominent in crop production, its positive impact on labour within the context of migrant farm workers remains relatively insignificant. The experience of Jamaican migrant farm workers suggests that digitization affects farm workers by facilitating increased monitoring and surveillance, pressure to perform, limited career development opportunities, limited autonomy, and isolation from support networks. The research has shown that some degree of digitization can offer benefits such as improved planning through weather tracking apps and potentially increased overall farm productivity. Many survey respondents indicated their specific limited use of technology on their farms, and the acknowledgment of tools like GPS-guided systems, mobile applications, and sensors reflects a gradual shift towards digitization within the agricultural sector. However, while there was acknowledgement of the presence of technology in the data, it was not implied that farm workers

directly use many of the production-related technologies such as GPS-guided tractors, robotics, temperature and moisture sensors and drones. Use of technology by farm workers was implied by interview participants to be limited to phone applications such as weather tracking and farm management (i.e., signing in and out of work with a given identity number to track workers), which may assist them to make decisions related to their productivity and comfort in the field, but is not directly involved in production. Even so, interview participants suggested that more advanced tools, if present on the farms, are used by farmers or workers in higher skill categories. For example, GPS-guided tractors were suggested by Participant 1 as being used by farmers only, while the presumption is that “seeding scientists” hired on the farm might use other forms of technology to assist in the production of seedlings, after which farm workers are then tasked to transplant them into the soil manually. In this light, digitization can offer limited advantages for workers, especially those whose primary motivation for participating in the SAWP program was to learn about new technologies. Instead, workers have reduced development opportunities and are primarily subjected to strenuous manual labour expectations, associated with the skill category in which they are employed. That is, farmers through the SAWP hire migrant farm workers as low-skilled labourers, primarily for manual labour. Farm workers, therefore, are involved in farm tasks that require little to no use of technology. Furthermore, the types of technologies participants mentioned that are involved in the surveillance of workers, including production surveillance (i.e., farm management applications such as logging-in apps and scoreboards) and security surveillance (i.e., surveillance cameras), are often skewed towards an oppressive atmosphere in agricultural settings. Workers report systems that track their productivity and publicly rank them on performance boards, which forces a competitive atmosphere that might incentivize hard work at the cost of the workers’ well-being. Furthermore,

the historical evolution of surveillance practices, as noted by various participants, underscores an element of distrust among farmers and racialized workers. This revealed a lack of trust between employers and workers, which perceives workers as a threat (Thomas, 2016). Workers are perceived as reliable when working under pressure, which is often facilitated by the denial of citizenship rights that legitimizes the differential treatment of workers (Thomas, 2016). These practices spiral beyond a production-oriented environment into labour force control, compromising Jamaican migrant farm workers' rights and dignity. For example, performance tools like scoreboards or applications for logging in to work are favoured for operational efficiency and profit, as they allow employers to exert more control by surveilling productivity without necessarily improving working conditions or security. This practice drives on-farm productivity competitions between workers, prioritizing productivity over workers' welfare, decreasing job satisfaction as workers feel they are constantly being watched and judged on their performance.

As a result, constant monitoring and competition fostered by digital labour practices may extend beyond production yet serve to preserve production through entrenched power dynamics that reflect broader systems of inequality. Experiences of heightened scrutiny and pressure disproportionately affect those from racialized backgrounds, leading to increased stress and health problems, whereas participants have mentioned experiences of not eating well, feeling drained, not sleeping well, injury and fear. This can make workers feel like they have little control over their work pace and environment, worsened by the physical isolation of farms and restrictions on outside visits, combined with the surveillance, can limit workers' access to support from friends or family. With technology monitoring their activities, workers experience a reduction in freedom of movement and decision-making. This can cultivate a sense of

vulnerability, as they may feel there is no one to help them in case of an emergency or to voice their concerns. This environment can inhibit their ability to advocate for better conditions or to access support systems, reinforcing cycles of economic and social marginalization.

As evident from the previous paragraphs, technologies are not necessarily involved in completing farm workers' daily tasks. This suggests that farms are more occupied with labour power than digital power when it comes to crop production. The implication I have found, however, connects to the value of labour power when compared to digital power in the commodification process, revealing gross illusions about the labour of migrant workers and the perpetuation of exploitation. According to Marx (1867), "nothing can hold value without being an object of utility," and if the object is useless, the labour that made it is also meaningless. That is, for a product, whether commoditized or not, to essentially hold value, it must satisfy a want when in the consumption process (Marx, 1867). This implies that crops produced and exchanged with capital for consumption by the Canadian society hold value. Based on this analogy, the labour of migrant farm workers also holds value. However, hidden in the value exchanged between labour and production is the blurred exchange value of labour for wages, which reflects the influence of racial capitalism. Racial capitalism within agriculture creates an illusion of less value by enabling a system that diminishes racialized migrant farm workers to less than humans, whilst producing "valuable" commodities, justifying a perceived reduction of the value of the workers' labour in exchange for low wages. This is how capitalism perpetuates exploitation in racial agricultural communities, allowing cheap labour yet large profits from commoditization. Additionally, while human labour production over time adds value to the commodity (Marx, 1867), digital production can increase yield, but in turn leads to market competition that drives price reduction, not in favour of profiting, leaving human exploitation as a means of capital

accumulation. The critical perspective offered by Participant 2 on whether technology has truly decreased food costs highlights the broader economic inequalities preserved by racial capitalism, where technological advancements enrich owners without improving working conditions for workers. In this context, digitization serves not just as a tool for business efficiency but as a mechanism that perpetuates the exploitation of marginalized racial groups while benefiting only a privileged few.

4.3.4. Consolidation Impacts

The findings affirm that the agricultural landscape remains deeply influenced by the principles of racial capitalism, where economic opportunities are stratified along racial and ethnic lines and the accumulation of land is utilized to drive production in achieving profits. This sheds light on the systemic barriers faced by small farmers and racialized workers that encourage or prevent equitable access to resources, rights, and opportunities. These disparities challenge the broader structures of oppression that perpetuate racial and economic injustice. The perspectives provided by Participant 1 suggest that consolidation may enhance production and employment opportunities for some. This is supported by the claims of Falconer (2020), in that obtaining larger lands has evidently increased production while encouraging wage increases to attract more workers to cultivate the land. More specifically, Falconer (2020) emphasizes that by increasing acreage, farmers can effectively manage the expanding amount of land each employee is responsible for, which can be achieved by hiring additional staff, typically raising wages, or enhancing the productivity of each worker, often through the use of technological advancements.

Consolidation in this sense can provide added livelihood opportunities for migrant farm workers; however, it is not without systemic inequities. Participant 1's observation that larger

farms, such as the one he works, dominate in quality and marketability highlights how consolidation inherently benefits those with existing capital, echoing the principles of racial capitalism where wealth accumulation is concentrated among a privileged few (Robinson, 2020). This reflects a cycle where small farmers, who may disproportionately come from marginalized racial and ethnic backgrounds, face barriers to entry and success in a market increasingly controlled by large agribusinesses (Sommerville & Magnan, 2015). Furthermore, Participant 3's observations about the ongoing acquisition of land by larger farms without restrictions further highlight the role of structural forces that favour the concentration of capital and resources. This relentless drive for land expansion not only threatens the viability of small farms but also reinforces the marginalization characterizing a small farmer's experiences in agricultural labour. While increasing production, consolidation perpetuates systemic inequities that disadvantage small farmers.

Furthermore, systemic barriers persist beyond the Canadian borders to impact Jamaican workers in their homeland. Upon migrant workers' return to Jamaica, the SAWP participation creates exclusion from national programs for the Jamaican workforce through the National Housing Trust's exclusionary policies. Farm workers, therefore, are restricted by their involvement in SAWP from engaging in land and housing ownership in Jamaica through capital assistance. Contrastingly, the narratives shared by Participants 4 and 5 emphasize the impact of personal agency and past experiences on land ownership and investment. While Participant 4 illustrates the challenges of maintaining agricultural productivity in the absence of long-term residence, their efforts to invest in land reflect resilience in the face of systemic barriers. On the other hand, Participant 5, who successfully acquired land, highlights how post-program access

can be transformative yet still situated within a broader context of inequality shaped by colonial histories and ongoing racial dynamics in land ownership and agricultural practices.

4.3.5. Financialization Impacts

The growing influence of business interests in Canadian agriculture observed by respondents—particularly in the consolidation of smaller farms by larger entities—illustrates not only economic motivation but also reinforces existing power dynamics within the agricultural landscape (Sommerville & Magnan, 2015). With much interest in purchasing land from smaller farms associated with increased production, this has a direct impact on the labour force. The employment of workers at low wages significantly contributes to the capital accumulation necessary for land expansion. This links back to the literature in how labour commodification relies on cheap, productive labour (Akram-lodhi, 2021) from workers dependent on the capitalist systems through selling their labour to survive (Akram-Lodhi, 2010). This practice not only enhances the profitability of agricultural enterprises but also enables the reinvestment of resources into the acquisition of additional land, highlighting the relationship between the commodification of land and labour as Albritton (2009) pointed out. Akram-Lodhi (2021) highlighted the historical extraction of natural resources and its role in fostering monopolistic practices that perpetuate discrimination, social stratification, and violence. This is evident in the transformation of the agri-food sector, where the combined processes of digitization, consolidation, and financialization work together to create exclusivity in resource access, all while reinforcing the cyclical process of exploitation for wealth accumulation, trapping workers in the process as they need the employment to survive and support their families. In my research, a notable 80% of survey participants cited “financial stability” as their primary reason for participating in the SAWP, citing financial support for their families as a key reason for their

engagement. A following 54.3% of respondents indicated that the program helped them support their families, underscoring the vital role these wages play in their livelihoods and the broader community. This highlights the economic pressures faced by many in Jamaica, where limited job prospects compel them to seek opportunities in Canada. The reliance on remittances to support families back home further emphasizes the interconnectedness of global financial systems and local economies. Participant accounts detailing their hardships under financialization reveal a broader narrative of economic dependency that further entrenches inequalities. In this way, financialization in combination with racial capitalism is exhibited in the misleading realities migrant workers face in Canada when having to prioritize immediate financial gains as a proletarian in migration (Sharpe, 2016) over an unjust experience. The cyclical process of exploitation for wealth accumulation is a reinforced mechanism that entraps workers, as they rely on employment to sustain their families. This dynamic reflects the systemic barriers that perpetuate inequality and highlight the dependence of labour on capital for survival within the economic structure. In Jamaica, government prioritization of remittances over worker protections exemplifies how state policies can reinforce exploitative labour conditions for marginalized groups, thus perpetuating a cycle of economic subjugation. According to Wells *et al.* (2014), the Jamaican Ministry of Labour has monitored the total amount contributed through a compulsory savings program that requires all employees to set aside 16 percent of their earnings through mandatory deductions. In 2012, \$16.1 million Canadian dollars were remitted by the Jamaican government, translating to an average of \$2,557 Canadian dollars for each Jamaican migrant farm worker (Jamaica Ministry of Labour and Social Security 2013), without reflecting remittances sent directly to families in Jamaica (Wells *et al.*, 2014). In the findings, Participant 4 illustrated an example of income retention through their experience. Participant 4, who received

approximately \$5,500 Canadian dollars during the program which was reduced to approximately \$1,000 upon their return home, illustrates how, despite earning what may seem like a substantial amount within the Jamaican economy, the deductions for essential living expenses and remittances (to the government and to families) leave the Jamaican migrant worker with very little upon returning home. This finding reveals the significant financial challenges faced by workers in Jamaica, particularly those engaged in agricultural labour. It highlights the disparity between the wages earned and the living expenses and obligations these workers must manage. The prioritization of remittances by the government indicates a focus on monetary inflow rather than on improving the working conditions and compensation for workers. This situation not only reflects the inadequacy of the compensation structures but also emphasizes the broader issue of economic subjugation, where marginalized groups remain trapped in a cycle of exploitation and limited financial mobility. It suggests a need for policy reforms that address labour rights and improve compensation for migrant workers, thereby fostering better economic stability and opportunities.

4.4. Conclusion

The complexities surrounding the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) highlight profound ethical and systemic challenges in the treatment of migrant farm workers. Despite the economic opportunities that the program ostensibly provides, many workers experience a reality characterized by exploitation, fear, and inadequate support. The power dynamics favour employers, facilitated by government policies that prioritize agricultural productivity over the well-being of workers. Furthermore, the interplay of digitization, financialization, and consolidation within the agri-food sector has significant implications for resource access and labour relations. These processes contribute to monopolistic practices that

not only exacerbate social stratification but also perpetuate discrimination and violence through racial capitalism.

This situation raises critical questions about the efficacy and morality of current labour agreements, as they often perpetuate a cycle of marginalization and vulnerability among migrant workers, which is a reflection of racial capitalism. The mixed experiences of Jamaican farm workers underscore the urgent need for reforms that promote fair wages, improved working conditions, and enhanced protections for their rights. Establishing pathways for greater mobility and security, such as open work permits or opportunities for permanent residency, is essential to empower workers and foster a more equitable labour market.

The effective management of a substantial workforce within the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) is fundamentally contingent upon the collaboration of various stakeholders. These multifaceted relationships showcase how dynamics within the agri-food industry contribute to the program's operational success and help to shape the experience of Jamaican migrant farm workers. The relationship between worker and employer is where most of the impacts are displayed. However, an interesting observation in the study is how the labour relations between Jamaican migrant farm workers and farm employers extend beyond the immediate employer-employee relationship to the influence of contributing parties (e.g., involved governments) that contribute to the formation and evolution of Jamaican migrant farm worker and farm employer relationships. Addressing these issues requires concerted efforts from all stakeholders, including governments, employers, and advocacy groups, to create a fairer system that not only addresses labour shortages but also respects the dignity and rights of the individuals who significantly contribute to Canada's agricultural sector. In the end, the integrity of the food system hinges on the humane treatment of all workers within it.

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