

Title: Mexican Migrant Agricultural Workers and Accommodations in Farms in the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia.

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Research Question:

What are the accommodations for Mexican migrant labourers working on farms in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley?

Importance:

Our study examines the growing number of migrant farm workers coming to the Okanagan under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP). It is the first to investigate, discuss, and present the housing conditions of foreign farm workers in the Okanagan, the second most important agricultural region in BC.

Research Findings:

Our research showed that the quality of Mexican farm workers' accommodations is inconsistent. The problems are partly the result of a lack of government oversight as well as a lack of transparency in housing inspections. In addition, we found that the SAWP wholly benefits farmers and does little to protect farm workers from abuse and exploitation by unscrupulous employers. On the contrary, its policies reinforce the workers' vulnerability and deny them the right to complain about their treatment. Furthermore, the Canadian and provincial governments have dismantled labour legislation and protections that could have allowed migrant workers to express their grievances without fear of reprisal. Finally, our research found that the Mexican Consulate pays little attention to their compatriots' complaints with regard to their living and working conditions on Okanagan farms.

Implications:

Our paper makes several policy recommendations. First, the Mexican government must take a leadership role in addressing farm workers' concerns. This would include making regular visits to farms to discuss workers' issues. Second, there must be a strong push to allow migrant workers the opportunity to become landed immigrants. Having this process in place would go a long way to minimizing the abuse and sense of entrapment many workers feel by being tied to one employer and one labour market. Third, the provincial government must take steps to ensure uniformity in housing accommodations for farm workers. For instance, they must increase the number of people conducting housing inspections in the Okanagan Valley. They must also ensure that there is an arm's length relationship between the farmer and the inspector and proper transparency and accountability in the inspection process. Finally, the government should ensure that farmers provide workers with some independent means of transportation.